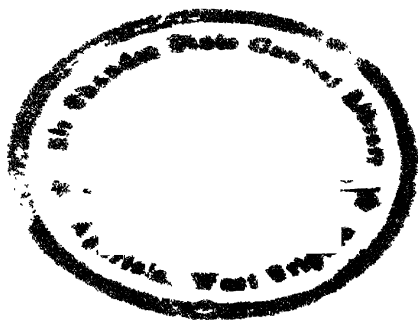


Rāmāyaṇam
as told by
Vālmīki and Kamban

Rāmāyaṇam as told by Vālmīki and Kamban

K.S. SRINIVASAN



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*Dedicated to
Sītā
daughter of Mother Earth*

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Prologue

The story of Rāma has been told many times, in many languages, ever since Vālmiki's account of it shaped itself about two thousand years ago. The reader would, therefore, expect to find a manifest justification for one more book, beyond that of the author's subjective satisfaction in handling the great story.

What this book offers is a comparative study of *Rāmāyaṇam* as told by the *ādikavi*, Vālmiki, and as rendered by Kamban, the first poet to re-tell the epic in a regional language, viz., Tamil. Kamban came nearly ten centuries after Vālmiki; his language, Tamil, endowed him with an inheritance that was rich and felicitous, yet distinct from Sanskrit. Thus, commonality as well as individuality can be discerned in every page, as the two poets are held side by side. While Vālmiki is the source and inspiration for Kamban, the difference in the cultural milieu that influenced the two poets is reflected in the many little points of linguistic and literary excellence that enrich the narrative, in either language.

However, what has been a desideratum is a comparative view of the two classics; although translations in English are available of Vālmiki in full and of Kamban in parts, a critical appreciation of the two is something which the earnest reader does not have. This work has its genesis in the belief that a binocular view of Vālmiki and Kamban can open up unseen vistas of literary gratification — belief which I had occasion to test in my book '*Kāvya Rāmāyaṇam*' that came out in Tamil. The response which that book has evoked has been such as to reiterate the importance of bilingual studies. The growing interest in Rāmāyaṇa studies in the countries

of S.E. Asia also warrants the assumption that a study of this kind can stimulate further interest in the literary aspects of the two classics in Sanskrit and Tamil.

Literature is, indeed, the aspect on which the focus is held; for, it is as an epic poem that Vālmiki gave his work to the world and that work is held as primeval in Indian literature. If succeeding generations fostered the divinity of Rāma, it was a consequence of the custom by which ruling chiefs sought to identify themselves with Rāma, leading to the notion of *deva-rāja*, which spread even beyond the shores of India. To reinforce the image of Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu was to raise themselves in the eyes of their subjects. Kamban's epic which belongs to the tenth century A.D. retains, in adequate measure, the vitality of human characterisation that is manifest in Vālmiki; with an occasional reference in extolling terms to the divinity of Rāma, Kamban achieves a portrait with a 'multi-dimensional effect', without detriment to the human aspect.

Rāma, as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, stands deified in the temples of India; as one who embodies some of the noblest of human virtues, Rāma is enshrined in the hearts of millions of human beings in Asia. Held in esteem as an exemplar of moral power, Rāma holds sway in countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, establishing, beyond set notions, the ennobling experience of nobility of character in its universal aspect. Humanity owes that experience to the creative genius of Vālmiki.

How that genius came to him in a flash is, by itself, a story of literary significance. For, it was when Vālmiki reacted with compassion towards an innocent bird unjustly killed by a cruel hunter that his speech acquired a poetic quality: Vālmiki the saint became Vālmiki the poet instantly. It was in that mood and in such newly-endowed gift of expression that Vālmiki was led to undertake the task of telling the story of Rāma, in epic style. Tradition has it that it was Brahmā who ordained Vālmiki to do so; but, perhaps, there is equal significance in the studied use of the Sanskrit words *śōka*

and *ślōka* to describe how sorrow (on seeing the plight of the injured bird) gave rise to poetry, worthy of the great task. The word *kavi*, which denotes a poet, as well as a sage, is also derived etymologically from the verb *ku* which means the wailing cry of a bird.

Chastened by a distressing experience that evoked compassion, blessed by the Creator, and inspired by the blossoming of the poetic genius that lay dormant, Vālmiki became uniquely gifted. What he achieved therefrom was the creation of unique characters — Rāma, Sitā and Rāvaṇa — each unique; in all the literature of India they remain without parallel.

Rāma, the hero, is a prince of valour and nobility, born to rule. But he grows into a man with commitment to *dharma*, thanks to his tutelage under Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra in early life. In all situations, whether it be in joy or sorrow, in triumph or in failure, whether it be in the palace or in the forest, Rāma sees himself as impelled by *dharma*. The result is the evolution of an unusual personality — a royal hero, obsessed by unworldly principles; in his detachment to life, Rāma is perceived as close to Lord Buddha.

Rāvaṇa, the anti-hero, is also unique in his own way. Born to Viśravas, a Brahmin of great spiritual power, Rāvaṇa learns the discipline of *tapasyā* (penance) which leads to his acquisition of superhuman power, both physical and spiritual. The influence of his tribal mother, Kaikasi, reflects itself in his ambition, cunning and ruggedness. The result is unbridled arrogance. Winning boon after boon from the gods through penance, moving from victory to victory in war with demons and deities, capturing woman after woman by means of pelf and lure, Rāvaṇa lets his ego soar aloft until it becomes necessary for it to be brought down by a 'mere man', as he perceives Rāma.

Sitā, the central figure, enters the story as a charming girl on the eve of her marriage; born to wed and live a life of regal splendour, she finds herself overtaken by events that test her resources, again and again. As she goes through them —

banishment from Ayōdhyā, abduction in Daṇḍakāraṇya, and imprisonment in Laṅkā — she is seen to grow into a woman of steel; every course in adversity brings out a new hidden strength within. The acme of hers is when the fall of Rāvaṇa brings her face to face with a hostile husband, instead of the triumphant hero she longed to be reunited with. Her final vindication is an attestation of what feminine power can attain, when imbued with quality, implied in the word *mahā-bhāgā*, which described Sitā as a young bride.

Such distinct individuality of character is unravelled in the course of a story that is rich in dramatic moments and sudden turns, in which individuality as well as strength seem to be frequently under test and trial. The banishment of Rāma on the very day he was to take the crown, consequent upon a sudden change of heart in his step-mother Kaikeyī, who was really fond of him, is the beginning of such quirks of fortune that fall to the lot of the main characters. The chance arrival of Sūrpanakhā near the precincts of Rāma's cottage in Daṇḍakāraṇya, which eventually leads to Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sitā, is another.

Among the other features that embellish the epic, one is the interplay of cultures as obtaining in different societies — the value-based aristocracy of Ayōdhyā, the forest-dwelling clan of *vānaras* and the ruggedly mighty *rākṣasas*. Another is the juxtaposition of fraternal affinity as manifest in Rāma's family, with the running feud between Sugrīva and Vālī, and the strongly differing loyalties that are exhibited by Rāvaṇa's brothers. By far the most significant element in the story is the transformation of Rāvaṇa, from arrogance to abject surrender, in the face of the moral power which Sitā is able to invoke. The manner in which the rude Chieftain brings innocent Sitā as prisoner in lonely Laṅkā, while she trembles in fear and walls in grief, only to result gradually in a reversal of roles as Rāvaṇa begs for love, placing his head at her feet, while she spurns his offer and rebukes him firmly, would conform to the Greek concept of *peripeteta*, a sudden turn in character or situation. Rāvaṇa's death at the hands of

Rāma seems but a formal disposal of an unbending man whose defeat has already taken place at the hands of Sitā.

Kamban

Vālmiki's classic soon became a model and an inspiration to many a poet, both within and outside India; Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Dinnaga, Kumāradāsa, and Bhatti are names that attest the *continuum* of that tradition. However, outside the Sanskrit heritage, Kamban happens to be the first poet to create an epic narrative on the story of Rāma, in a modern Indian language. Writing in Tamil in the medieval period, Kamban was heir to the corpus of literature dating back to what is known as Sangam period (circa 2nd to 5th cent. A.D.) as well as to the flood of devotional hymns, poured forth by the Vaiṣṇava saints known as Ālwārs. Yet, it is a measure of his poetic stature that Kamban is spoken of as '*Kavi Chakravarti*' in the Tamil tradition. Also of significance is the title he gave to his account of Rāmāyaṇam, viz., '*Rāmāvatāram*' which lends a clue to the full-grown recognition of Rāma's divinity. Kamban's epic bears the stamp of all such influences; but his source and inspiration is Vālmiki whom he describes as 'the poet with the capacity for the inevitable word' (*vāṅgarum pādam nāṅum vakutta Vālmiki enbān*).

Tradition has it that Kamban once heard an exposition of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇam, spread over several sessions every evening, and that he would, every morning, render into Tamil poetry the story as heard the previous evening. However, as one studies Kamban, the internal evidence amply demonstrates the poet's close knowledge of Vālmiki, as found in the Southern rescension. Examples are 1) the encounter between Lakṣmaṇa and Ayōmukhi in the jungle (page 137) and the encounter with Laṅkā that Hanumān has, before entering Laṅkā (page 175). That he was well-versed enough in Sanskrit to have had access to the original text can also be inferred from the many words and usages in Sanskrit which he sprinkles his narrative with, albeit in Tamilised form (*arṥi*

= seeker takes the form *arutti*: Kamban uses the expression *en padam* in Tamil, the way Vālmiki uses *āśrama padam*), to mean 'at the door'). When the poet finds a passage in Vālmiki attractive or dramatically significant, he renders almost a direct translation of it in Tamil, as when Rāvaṇa boasts of his prowess to Sītā (cf. *uḍvaheyam bhujābhuyām...* and *meruwai-p parikka vendin...*, p. 131 n). But where change is warranted, Kamban does not hesitate to differ; the dialogue between Rāma and Vālī is an instance. Sometimes there is shift in emphasis, as in the handling of the Surpanakhā episode, or the characterisation of Kumbhakarna. An entirely original scene is created in Maya Janaka Patalam, which lends another dimension to Rāvaṇa's personality.

Thus it is that Kamban's work acquires a distinct stamp, rising in stature so as to stand comparison with the *ādī-kāvya*m. As one reads the two epics together, the difference in language recedes, yielding place to a comparative view of the felicity in the two languages that has been harnessed by two great minds with a single purpose. Genius is genius, though it may show itself in many forms.

The object of the book being what it is, passages and sequences have been selectively employed, though the running narrative does cover the story without being exhaustive. Battle scenes and elaborate descriptions of places and journeys have thus been left out. However, the book closely follows the text of Vālmiki and Kamban offers what may be deemed as readable translation in English of the poetic and dramatic content in the originals. The purpose is comparative study.

The main narrative draws from Vālmiki, albeit in summary; Kamban's version is discussed at the end of each section. As works of standard reference, the critical edition of Vālmiki (Oriental Research Institute) and the Kazhagam edition of Kamban are used. Close adherence to the original has been attempted, without appearing to offer a literal translation. Key passages are cited in the notes at the end of each section to facilitate ready reference and comparison.

V.II.5:43 would thus denote Vālmiki, Ayōdhyā Kāṇḍa, sarga 5, ślōka 43, critical edition; K.423 would similarly stand for stanza 423 of Kambar, Kazhagam edition.

With the increasing interest in Rāmāyana studies, which international seminars have stimulated in recent years, it now seems opportune to view Kambar's work in the perspective of Indian literature. This book is meant to serve as an introduction, not only to those who wish to obtain a comparative view of the epics in Sanskrit and Tamil, but to those in the S.E. Asian countries who look for linkages between their own local versions of the Rāma story and the versions that reached them from India, at different times in different ways. For, it is not by chance that there are similarities between Kambar's account and, say, that which is found in Thailand's 'Rāma Kien'; an instance is the chance meeting between Rāma and Sītā, the young man catching a glimpse of the princess as she stood on her terrace in Mithilā. Again, Kambar's version of Daśaratha as receiving a *pindam* (not *pāyasam*) as the divine gift after the horse-sacrifice, is endorsed by the sculptor in Prambanan (central Java).

Comparative study of Vālmiki and Kambar is a rewarding experience; when an integral view of Indian literature prevails, one of the delights that await the reader is the commonly shared corpus of literary flourishes and devices, known as *alamkāra*, in the two languages that modern scholarship has consistently deemed as different (Aryan and Dravidian). That the metaphors and similes found in ancient Indian literature are manifest alike in Thai or Javanese should also be significant.

K.S. Srinivasan

New Delhi

I

The Birth of Poesy

(**V**ālmiki Rāmāyaṇam begins with an episode* which the literary tradition has held to be of deep significance. It relates to the transformation of Vālmiki the saint into Vālmiki the poet; the instant change came about the moment he reacted with profound compassion — *kāruṇya* — on seeing what he considered to be unjust (*adharmā*). That which flowed out of his compassionate soul, while telling the tale of Rāma, has come to be known as *ādi kāvya*.)

One day Vālmiki reached the banks of the river Tamasā, not far from river Gaṅgā. On seeing the clear waters, he told his disciple, 'Listen, Bhāradwāja: the water is clear and flows in joyous smile like the mind of good men. Give me my bark and place the pitcher here; let me bathe here, in this excellent stream of Tamasā.' He then moved about, surveying the forest — the man of controlled senses. Nearby, he saw a pair of mating birds, in tireless amour; the *krauñcha* pair made cooing sounds. As he watched, he saw a hunter of evil ways shoot the male bird. The wife-bird wailed in pathetic notes, looking at the bleeding mate, trembling on the ground.

Seeing the bird, felled by the hunter, the saint was filled

* This actually occurs in the second *sarga*, but the opening one is prefatory, narrating how Vālmiki derived guidance from Nārada as to who is an ideal man, dedicated to *dharma* and yet endowed with valour and noble qualities. The answer is 'Rāma'.

with compassion, devoted as he was to *dharma*. The pathetic wail made him feel it was unjust (*adharma*), as he listened to the weeping female. He said this: 'Of the mating pair, you did kill the male in love, O hunter! You shall find no peace, never.'¹ As he spoke, he reflected within, 'For this bird in grief, what did I say?' As he thought, the wise man told his disciple, 'with metre and words of even pace and lyrical grace, may this that was born of grief (*śōka*) turn into poesy (*ślōka*).'

After he bathed in the river, Vālmiki kept thinking of it and reached his hermitage. Deep in meditation, his mind was fancying many thoughts when the four-faced Brahmā, the Creator, arrived. Vālmiki saw and stood up quickly, quite surprised. He offered due honours to the divine visitor. Brahmā took his seat and bade Vālmiki sit beside. But, Vālmiki sat lost in thought again, reflecting on the same — the sorrow caused by the evil hunter and the way he killed the bird that chirped in such a beautiful tone, so unjustly. Lost in sorrow, he recalled his *ślōka* again. Brahmā smiled and said, 'Indeed you did make a *ślōka*; have no doubt. For, it was at my command that words flowed out of your lips. Now work on the tale of Rāma, O sage; tell the story of the hero who is endowed with noble qualities and commitment to *dharma*. You will know full well all about Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, both explicit and implicit. There will be not a single false note in your poem; make it in *ślōka*. While yet the mountains live and rivers flow, the tale of Rāma shall live, in all the worlds.' And then Brahmā disappeared.

As Vālmiki stood dazed in wonder, his disciples sang the *ślōka* again and again, turning sorrow into poetry. Vālmiki resolved to compose the entire Rāmāyaṇam as a *kāvya*.

Notes

1. *Mā nishāda prattiśthām twam agamah śāśwatih samāh
yat krauñchamithunāt ēkam avadhih kāmamōhitam*

II

Ayōdhyā

Kōsala was a prosperous *janapada*, on the banks of Sarayu, rich in farms and wealth; the city was known as Ayōdhyā, originally built by Manu himself. Twelve *yojanas* long and three in breadth, the city was well-built; the royal path was sprinkled with water and spread with flowers, every day. Here Daśaratha ruled, like Indra in heaven.

With door-panels rich in arches decorating shops evenly spread, with every type of arms and weapons made by artisans of all styles, with bards and minstrels abounding, with theatres for women everywhere, with gardens and mango groves protected by deep moats making the city inaccessible (for foes), with traders from many countries busy everywhere plying the camel, mule and ox, terraces laid with precious gems towering high, it was all like the city of Amarāvati of Indra. Bugles, drums and lute filled the air; distinguished men lived in those well-built houses — valorous ones who could kill tigers and boars with an arrow — even with muscle might. In such a city lived Daśaratha.

The king had eight ministers of wisdom and loyalty. Dhṛishti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhārtha, Arthasādhaka, Aśōka, Mantrapāla and Sumantra. Two *rsis*, Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadēva, well-versed in Śāstras and firm in mind, were also his advisors. Not even in anger, nor prompted by any motive, would they speak anything untrue, they could award punishment even to their sons, when necessary. So, there was none in the city who told lies, none given to evil ways, none coveting

another's wife.¹

Ruling thus, with ministers of such calibre and protected by spies, Daśaratha kept his people happy with his *dharma*. He had no enemy, neither equal nor superior.

The Sacrifice

While thus ruling the land gloriously, the man of *dharma* was grieved over the absence of a son to perpetuate the race. He reflected, 'why shouldn't I perform the horse sacrifice?' Ministers and wise men were summoned; on their advice, the king decided to bring the distinguished Rīśyaśringa to preside over the ritual. Daśaratha himself went to Anga and met his friend, Romapada; he placed his request before the friend to let his daughter, Sāntā and her husband, Rīśyaśringa, go over to Ayōdhyā for the great sacrifice. When the couple arrived, there was great rejoicing in Ayōdhyā; the women in the palace were happy to see the wide-eyed Sāntā.

When Spring came, learned men and experts in sacrifice, under the guidance of Rīśyaśringa, told the king to proceed with all arrangements and to release the horse. The king ordered accordingly and fixed the northern bank of Sarayu as the site for the sacrifice.

A year later, when Spring came again, the king made a humble request to Vasistha, 'You must take the whole burden of the sacrifice; you are dear to me as my *guru*.' The holy man agreed and called for elderly men expert in ritual offerings; besides, architects, artisans, workers, astrologers, theatre-artists, and learned men of every kind were summoned. He ordered arrangements to accommodate the many invitees and the provision of plentiful supply of food and drink, for one and all; ordinary people were to be fed earnestly without casualness. No word of discourtesy should be used, in anger or out of greed of any kind; all were to be treated with respect.

Then invitations were sent to rulers, including the vener-

able friend Janaka and the father-in-law, king of Kēkaya. When people reported completion of arrangements, Vasiṣṭha said again, 'Nobody should be given anything casually, without courtesy. Such a gift destroys the giver.' The sacrifice began, under the guidance of Rīśyaśringa, on an auspicious day.

When the sacrifice was concluded, king Daśaratha told Rīśyaśringa, 'I pray for progeny, to continue the line.' 'May it be so', said the sage, 'there will be four sons to foster the race.' He then reflected for a while and said, 'I shall now perform a wish-fulfilling ritual to obtain a son, as laid down in the Atharva Veda.' He then lighted the fire, with chants.

At this time, all the celestial beings gathered in front of Brahmā, the Creator, and said, 'O Lord, on the strength of boons you gave, the *rāksasa* known as Rāvana is harassing all of us; our valour is inadequate to discipline him. We have to bear the brunt, thanks to the boon you gave him. The evil-minded one is a menace to all the three worlds, he is intoxicated with the power of the boon. The Sun and the Wind, even the sea, all seem afraid of him. You must devise the means to his end.' Brahmā reflected for a while and said, 'Here is the solution. I conceded his prayer that he be invincible by any *dēva*, *dānava*, *rāksasa*, *gandharva*, or *yakṣa*. He overlooked man. Therefore, he shall meet his death at the hands of a man.'

Meanwhile, Viṣṇu arrived and sat beside Brahmā. They said to him, 'O Viṣṇu, we seek your service, in the cause of world welfare. The king of Ayōdhyā is noble and radiant, like a *ṛṣi*; he is devoted to *dharma*. Take the human form, as his progeny, by dividing yourself into four among his three queens. In such human form, destroy the evil Rāvana who is invincible by all the *dēvas*; he tortures us with his might.'

Viṣṇu then accepted to be the son of Daśaratha. The same time, the ritual prayer for a son was taking place in Ayōdhyā. From out of the sacrificial fire, there arose a dark figure clad in red clothes and radiant jewels; radiant like the Sun, with a vessel of gold and silver held in hand, the figure spoke:

'Know me as one who belongs to Prajāpati.' 'Welcome, Sir', said Daśaratha and asked, 'what can I do for you?' 'Take this *pāyasa*, sent by the gods. Give it to your wives; they will bring forth sons — that for which you have made this ritual.'

Daśaratha took the vessel, went round the figure and was filled with joy, like a poor man who came by wealth. He went into his inner chambers and told Kausalyā, 'Take this *pāyasa* and it will give you motherhood' and gave her half. Half of the remaining half he gave to Sumitrā and half of the rest to Kaikeyī; on second thoughts, he gave to Sumitrā what was left. All the women were happy.

Kamban's epic begins with a tribute to Vālmiki and his capacity for the inevitable word;² the poet likens himself to a dumb man striving to speak, motivated solely by love for the story.

However, the poet's mature style can be seen in the very first stanza of Bāla Kāṇḍa where he describes river Sarayū as skirting the land of Kōsala which does not let men stray away from the inviting looks of their wives, whose breasts sway beneath golden gems, though the five senses act as darts prodding the mind to wayward ways. While echoing Vālmiki's idea that there was none coveting another man's wife (veiled reference to the reprehensible Rāvana), Kamban seems to hark back to the 'Kural' which upholds manly grandeur as manifest in the quality of not casting a covetous glance at another's wife (Kural: 148 — *pirai manai nōkkāppērāṇmai*).

In some of the passages, Kamban rapturously portrays prosperity as seen in the Tamil tradition; he uses the term '*marudam*' which belongs to the conventional format of Sangam poems, and describes little children as wearing the talisman known as *aiṇṇṇai tāli*. In describing the traders in Kōsala, Kamban refers to boats overladen with merchandise — an instance of prochronism.

The prosperity in Ayōdhyā is depicted by means of a clever conceit: 'There was no charity; for, there was none to beg. Valour was never seen, for, there was none who dared to

challenge. Truth did not stand out; for, none did speak a lie. Wisdom did not show; for, all were well-versed.³

One point of literary interest is that in his account of Rīśyaśringa, extending over fifty stanzas, Kamban does not employ that proper name even once. The poet refers to the sage as *Kalaikkōttu muni* (I.215) which amounts to a literal translation of the name; the other epithet '*orukalai muka śringa*' also means the same (*kalai* in Tamil denotes the antelope and *kōdu* means horn, which is *śringa* in Sanskrit).

This stands out as the only instance where Kamban opts for a translation of a proper name occurring in Vālmiki Rāmāyanam. To students of cultural history, it may be of added interest that the name *Kalaikkōt* occurs as such in the Thai version of Rāmāyana, known as 'Rāma kien', composed by the king of Thailand, Rama I, in the 18th century A.D. Another detail worth noting is that Kamban describes the divine gift to Daśaratha as a ball of rice (*pindam*), not as *pāyasam*. The Thai version conforms to the detail as in Kamban, making it a gift of four balls of rice and the same depiction of four balls of rice can be seen in the bas-relief sculpture at Prambanan in central Java.

The Birth of Rāma

The great sacrifice was over and all invitees had gone away. Kausalyā soon gave birth to Rāma, endowed in every way — a part of Viṣṇu, born as son in Ikshvāku line. With a son of such radiance, Kausalyā looked splendid like Aditi when Indra was born.

Bharata was born to Kaikeyī, a veritable quarter of Viṣṇu, endowed with truth and valour. Lakṣmana and Śatrughna were born to Sunitrā — a half of Viṣṇu, between the two of them. Their names were determined by Vasīṣṭha, who took care of all the rituals right from birth. All the children were good by nature, pleasant to one and all, intelligent and well-versed in studies of Vēdic lore.

Of them, Rāma was the best, valorous and truthful. From early childhood, Lakṣmaṇa was close to Rāma; he would neither eat nor sleep in the absence of the elder brother. Śatrughna was, similarly, close to Bharata. Daśaratha was happy.

The divinity of Rāma, plainly stated by Vālmīki, is expressed indirectly by Kamban, but with deep devotion and sense of wonder, in the style of the Bhakti poets, known as Alvars. The birth of Rāma is hailed as the advent of that Being, who is beyond comprehension in all the scriptures and within whom the Universe is contained.¹ Later, while describing how the children were named by Vasiṣṭha, Kamban goes into ecstasy: 'To Him, the Supreme, who rushed to the aid of the elephant which raised its trunk and called out 'O you that rest asleep on bed of snake!', when caught in the jaws of the crocodile — to that Being, the name Rāma was given.'⁵

Notes

1. *Nāsit purē vā rāshtrē vā mrishāvādī narah kvachit
kaschitna dushtastatrāsit paradāraratī narah*
2. *vāṅgārum pādām nāṅgum vakutta vānmiki*
3. *Vanmai illai or varumai inmaiyaḷ
tiṇmai illai or cerunar inmaiyaḷ
unmai illai poi urai ilāmaiyaḷ
venmai illai palkēlvi mēvalāl*
(I.84)
4. *oru pakal ulakelām uḍai attuḷ podittu
arumaṇaikkku uṇarvarum avanai, anjanak
karumuḥtrkozhundu ezhil kāttum jōṭṭiyai
tīru urappayandanai tīramkol kōsalai*
(I.282)
5. *Karā malaya, talar kaikkari eittē
arā anaiyil tuyilvō! ena annāl
vīrāvi, alittarūl meipporulukkē
īrāman enappeyar eendanai anrē*
(I.296)

III

Viśwāmitra

By and by, Daśaratha began to consider the marriage of his sons. While he was discussing it with his council of ministers one day, there came the sage of great radiance, Viśwāmitra. The king himself received him with due honours and said, 'You are welcome, great sage; your arrival gives me great joy, as if I found a lost treasure. Tell me, what would you wish? I shall gladly fulfil. You are the one who elevated himself from the status of a Rājarsi to that of Brahmarṣi; this place is haloed by your presence.'

'There is none like you on Earth, O King', said Viśwāmitra, very pleased. 'You must do what I have in mind: be a man, true to his word. When I am doing my penance, there are two *rāksasas* who hinder me — Mārīcha and Subāhu. Give me your son, Rāma — truthful and valorous — to help. He, with his power and under my protection, is capable of vanquishing the *rāksasas*; and I will, in turn, endow him in many ways. Do not be over-fond of your son. I know him as of superhuman stature. If you wish for fame and *dharma*, you must send Rāma with me.'

Tormented in mind, the king collected himself and said, 'He is not yet sixteen, my Rāma of lotus eyes. I cannot see how he is competent to fight the *rāksasas*. I have a huge army and I shall myself lead them in the expedition and rid you of all obstacles. Don't take Rāma away; he is a boy, not yet trained. I am very old; he was born after long endurance. Don't take him away. He is very dear to me, the eldest among

my four sons; please do not take him away. But, tell me who are these *rākṣasas* and what is their strength?

Viśwāmitra replied, 'A *rākṣasa* of Pulastya race, known as Rāvana, is a menace to all, having obtained boons from Brahmā. It is said he is the brother of Kubēra, both being the sons of Viśravas. When he cannot come himself, he directs these two, Mārīcha and Subāhu, to hinder and defile any *Yajña*.' The king said, 'Have mercy on my son, please. Even I cannot face that *rākṣasa*. I beg of you, O sage! How can I send this boy with no knowledge of warfare? No, I cannot part with my son.'

Viśwāmitra spoke in anger, 'So you want to break your promise? This shows the degradation of the race of Raghu. Well, if this seems proper to you, let me go my way. May you be happy with kith and kin, having been untrue to your word.' The Earth trembled at Viśwāmitra's indignant taunt.

Vasistha told the king, 'Born in the line of Ikshvāku, one becomes an embodiment of *dharma*; you should not transgress it. Keep up your *dharma*; if, after saying you would do a certain thing, you do not act accordingly it becomes a sin. So, let go of Rāma. Whether he stands armed or unarmed no *rākṣasa* can harm him, when Kausika is the protector — like Fire that guards the nectar of heaven. And Viśwāmitra is great in intellect as well as *tapasyā*; few know him true. So, have no hesitation in sending Rāma.'

Then the king handed over his son to Viśwāmitra, fully pleased within. Viśwāmitra left, followed by Rāma, bow in hand; Laksmana went along, as well.

In Kamban's version, Viśwāmitra does not give the historical background of Rāvana; nor is he mentioned, nor even Mārīcha or Subāhu, by name. There is just a passing reference to *nirudar* (*rākṣasas*) who hinder his rituals. (Even the edition of Val. Mu. Gopala Krishnamachari contains no additional stanzas.) Yet, the reaction of Daśaratha is intense, as in Vālmiki. His grief is likened to that of a blind man who, having got back his eyesight, lost it again (*kan ilān perru izhandān ena*) — symbolic of the issueless king who was

blessed with a son, only to lose him again!

While recommending the despatch of Rāma along with the sage, Vasistha says, 'The time has come now, for your son to obtain limitless knowledge — rushing like the floods of rain waters that reach for the sea.'¹ Kamban puts to use the familiar simile in Sanskrit, *ākāsāt patitam tōyam yathā gacchati sāgaram*.

(It is noteworthy that the 17th *sarga* in Vālmiki is very tight, Rāma's birth is mentioned in the 5th *ślōka*, the contemplation of the sons' marriage in the 22nd *ślōka*, Viśwāmitra's entry in the very next line, and so on. Vālmiki does not elaborate on Rāma's childhood. Kamban follows the same plan.)

In the Jungle, Led by Sage

Bow in hand and armed with quiver of arrows, the brothers radiantly walked along with Viśwāmitra, erect like Āświns that accompany Brahmā. When they walked for a while, Viśwāmitra said in gentle tone, 'Rāma, take some water in hand; there is no time to waste. Receive from me the power of the *mantra*, 'bala' and 'atibala'; you will never feel tired and whether you are asleep or awake, no *rāksasa* can overcome you. In all the three worlds, there shall be none equal to you. These two insights are verily like the offsprings of Brahmā and you alone are worthy to receive them.'

Rāma touched the water; thus, pure in mind and with joy on his face, he received the skills. The night was spent on the banks of Sarayu.

Early in the morning, Viśwāmitra called out to Rāma who was resting on the grass-mat and said, 'O son of Kausalyā, it is dawn now; wake up and the day's ritual must begin.'² The brothers bathed, chanted the divine chant and prostrated before the sage: they were ready to move.

As they reached the confluence of Sarayu with Gaṅgā, the boys were delighted to see the vicinity of a fine hermitage

They asked, 'whose is this?' Viśwāmitra smiled and said, 'This is where Kandarpa, the god of love, lived when he still had the bodily form. He tried to seduce Śiva who was in penance and got burnt to ashes, by the fiery eye of the Lord. Since then he is known as *ananga* (lit.: bodiless one). Sages and disciples live here now; let us spend the night here.'

The next day, the holy men prepared a boat and told Viśwāmitra to cross the river, with the princes. While crossing, Rāma inquired about the great noise made by the splashing waters. Viśwāmitra told Rāma of lake Mānasa Saras in Mount Kailāsa, which was the source of river Sarayu; 'where it joins with Gaṅgā this noise arises'.

Crossing the river, they reached a dense forest with many wild animals and birds. Viśwāmitra told the history of the forest and said, 'eventually, a Yaksi of strength and magical powers came to live here; she is Tātakā, wife of Sunda; her son is Mārīcha who spoils the land. That evil Tātakā lives nearby; use all your strength and kill her at my command, so that peace may be restored here. Have no hesitation to kill a woman; in the performance of kingly duties it is right. Kill this one given to *adharma*; she knows no *dharma*.'

Rāma said with folded hands, 'Father told me to obey what you say; he said this in the presence of elders in Ayōdhyā. I shall surely carry out this task of killing Tātakā.' He then raised his bow and filled the air with its twang. Attracted by that sound, Tātakā came running angrily. As she came shouting, Rāma said, 'Look at her, Lakṣmana — this Yaksini of magical power. I have no heart to kill her; her sex is her protection. But, let me chop off her ear and nose. That will quell her boast and check her movements.' But she ran towards Rāma with raised hand, to attack him. Rāma put an arrow into her; she fell and died.

Vālmīki describes Tātakā as having the strength of a thousand elephants (*nagasahasrasya balaṃ*); Kamban retains the phrase in translation (*aiyiru nooru maiyalma onriya valiyin!* — 1.359).

That the feminine form is misleading is also underlined in Kamban. 'If men are afraid to stand up to her, who is more manly than she?' asks Viśwāmitra, to which — without declaring his agreement — Rāma says, 'If something that is not *dharmā* (*aṛam* in Tamil) confronts, so long as you say 'do it', true *dharmā* is to take your word as Vēda and act.'³

Tātakā sends a rain of stones (*kallin mārṭ*) which Rāma wards off with his rain of arrows (*villin mārṭ*) and finally, when Rāma's arrow hits her it is likened to the force of a word of curse, which a sage might utter — a veiled reference, perhaps, to Viśwāmitra's ultimate responsibility for the deed.⁴ But, says the poet, the arrow did not stay; it went through the heart and fell on the ground, like words of wisdom addressed to illiterate ones (*kallāppullarku nallōr conna poruḷ anna*).

Guarding the Penance

Next day, Viśwāmitra said to Rāma, 'I am pleased with you. So, let me give you weapons of divine power with which you can conquer one and all.' Weapons of many names and varied power appeared before Rāma, saying 'we are at your command.' Rāma then asked the sage, 'I wish to know how to withdraw these weapons' and Viśwāmitra taught him the *mantra*.

As they went further, Rāma saw a dense forest. Viśwāmitra explained, 'Here was the abode of sage Vāmana; it was known as Siddhāśrama' and told the story of Nārāyaṇa's incarnation as Vāmana in order to humble the pride of Bali. 'This is where I shall do my penance, out of reverence for Vāmana. The *rākṣasas* will come to disturb me here; the evil ones must be killed.' Rāma and Lakṣmana told the sage, 'You may begin today itself.'

* Both the poets depict young Rāma as hesitant to shoot at a woman. Whether it is in obedience to Daśaratha's instruction or in deference to Viśwāmitra's order, the deed is in need of justification.

Six days and nights, alert and sleepless, the two archers guarded the sage. Then, as the sacrificial fire was burning bright, to the chanting of *mantras*, there was a terrible noise in the sky; dark clouds gathered and the *rākṣasas* of magical power, Mārīcha and Subāhu, defiled the place with streams of blood. Rāma saw them and told Lakṣmaṇa, 'See how I chase them with the Mānavāstra, as the winds blow away the clouds' and he released that weapon. Hit by it, Mārīcha was carried off very far and thrown into the sea. With the weapon of Fire, Rāma killed Subāhu. Pleased, at the end of the ritual, Viśwāmītra blessed Rāma and said, 'You have fulfilled what your *guru* told you to do.'

The next day, the brothers asked Viśwāmītra, 'What are your instructions? Please order us, as you like.' Then the sages assembled, led by Viśwāmītra, said, 'There is to be a great sacrifice in Mithilā. Come with us; we are going there. You must see the wonderful bow, gifted to Janaka by the gods. None has ever been able to string the bow — not all the Dēvas, Asuras, Gandharvas, let alone man. You will see the wonder and also the sacrifice.'

Kamban expends the story of Vāmana and Bali by adding a detail which is not in Vālmiki, viz., Śukra, the priest of Bali, seeking to avert the tragedy as Bali rashly promises what the dwarf asks for.

Ahalyā

Near the city of Mithilā, noticing a pretty but old and lifeless cottage, Rāma asked, 'Why is this holy hermitage vacant? I wish to know.' The radiant sage, skilled in speech, said, 'Well, I shall tell you all, in truth; listen. This belonged to Gautama once, before it became accursed; it was a place of worship, even for the gods. Here he lived a life of penance, along with Ahalyā, his wife.

'One day Indra planned deceit. He donned the hermit's garb and told Ahalyā this: 'devoted woman! those in want do not wait for time and place. I long for union with you, pretty one.'

'Knowing well it was Indra in hermit's costume, the silly woman agreed; she was excited that it was the lord of the *dēvas*. Then she said to Indra, gratefully, 'Now that your wish is fulfilled, go away quickly from here. Guard yourself and protect me too, in every way, honourable man.' 'I am gratified, lovely woman. I shall go my way' and he went out like a cat.

Though his steps hastened, suspecting that Gautama might return, there he saw the great sage, Gautama — the man of spiritual power, fresh from a bath. The chief of *dēvas* grew pale and afraid. But, seeing Indra dressed like a sage, the sage spoke in anger to the man of bad conduct, 'You assumed my form to do this, you scoundrell! this was never to be done. You shall cease to be man, from now ' As the angry words were being spoken, Indra's scrotums fell to the ground.

'Having cursed Indra, the sage turned to Ahalyā. 'You shall live in this cottage for many years, in squalor and hunger, unseen by any. You shall become pure only when Rāma enters this dreaded forest.' When you receive him with due honours and play host to him, rid of greed and desire, you will regain your normal self and be with me.' He then left this hermitage and went off to the Himalayas for further penance.

'Now, come Rāma; redeem Ahalyā, the woman of great qualities and lustrous form.' Then Rāma and Lakṣmana, led by Viśwāmītra, entered the cottage. Rāma saw the noble woman, rendered more radiant by penance. She seemed a splendid one, created by the Maker with great care. But she was like a flame engulfed in smoke, or like the light of Sun beneath a cloud, dark and dense.

Rāma touched her feet and Lakṣmana too. She, in turn, touched Rāma's feet, remembering what Gautama had said. She offered due honours; Rāma accepted all. Flowers were showered from heaven and the gods praised Ahalyā, saying, 'well done' to the woman who stood cleansed by the power of penance.

Gautama returned; he and his wife rendered full honours to Rāma. Rāma accepted it all in a traditional way and went

to Mithilā.

Kamban's account of the Ahalyā episode is influenced by the version in 'Padma Purāṇa' which depicts Ahalyā as turning into a stone, under the curse of Gautama. So, it runs as follows: Beside the ramparts of Mithilā, there stood a dark rock in a vacant land — the languishing wife of the sage who stooped to destroy the sanctity of the home. At the touch of the dust from the feet of Rāma, she regained her form and stood as a woman. Sage Viśwāmītra said, 'If this should happen thus, is there a doubt, this world can only have relief, no grief? Heroic man of cloud-like hue! I watched your nimble hand in combat with demoness there, here I see the glory of your foot.'^{*} In a single stanza, Kamban links the two important events in Rāma's early life, both under Viśwāmītra's tutelage. Both are controversial, raising questions of moral import; more so the latter. The redemption of a woman, impulsively led astray, follows as a natural process in Vālmiki, once she has undergone penance; for, it is a cleansing exercise (*tapōbala viśuddhaṅgi*).

The transformation into a stone and the magic touch of Rāma's foot to restore Ahalyā to her original form is another kind of device; it drives home the power of a curse which the wrong-doer might incur and the magical touch of mercy in the divine.

Kamban's narrative seems disjointed, in the form in which it has come down to us. For, as soon as Ahalyā is restored to human form, it is in her presence that Viśwāmītra proceeds to tell Rāma elaborately the story of her transgression, with some salacious details extending over 7 stanzas. Ahalyā stands listening! Unless the portion from stanza 466 to 474 is treated as interpolation, it becomes difficult to do justice not only to Kamban as a poet but also to Ahalyā as a person worthy of poetry.^{*} The poet could not have overlooked the

* The stanza is well-known for its rhetorical use of the word *vanṇam* eight times — twice in each line.

Ignoring the nine stanzas (466 to 474) would also enable the reader to see the continuity between *pandal vanṇamāi nirṇaṇal* in 465 and the rhetorical extravagance of *vanṇam* in 475.

primacy accorded to Ahalyā in the Indian tradition which places her on par with Sitā, in the galaxy known as *Panchakanyā*. Also, if the episode is not perceived as a veiled lesson for Rāma in moral education of the higher kind, the story of Ahalyā and Rāma's association therewith would all be meaningless. (Etymologically, the word *Ahalyā* means free of blemish.)

Notes

1. *Peyyum mārtāl peruhu veḷḷam pōi
moḷkoḷ vēḷaivāt muduhum ārupōḷ
ayya! nīn makarku alavil vīnjal vandu
eḍukālam inru eḍimadadu ennavē*
(I.329)
2. *Kausalyā suprajā Rāma! purvā sandhyā pravartatē
uttishṭha naraśārdula kartavyam dāivamānhukam*
(I.22:2)
3. *Aṭyan angu adu kēṭtu aran allavum
eḍināl 'adu seiṭka' enṇu eviṇcāl
'metyya! nīn urai vēdam' enukkodu
seiṭkaḷ anṛō aṇam seiṇṇu āṇu, enṛān*
(I.383)
4. *Col okkum kadiya vegac-chudu caram kariya cemmaḷ
al okkum nīrattināl mēḷ vidutalum, vaṭyirak-kunṇak-
kaḷ okkum nenṇil tangādu aṇṇuṇam kazhanṇu, kallāp-
pullarku nallōr conna poruḷ eṇṇa, pōyirṇu anṛē*
(I.388)
5. *Ivvanam nīhazhnda vannaṁ, inṇi inḍa ulahukkellām
uyivannaṁ anṇi, maṇṇōr tuyarvannaṁ uruvadundō?
Maivaṇṇattu arakki pōṇil, mazhalvannaṁ annalē! un
kaivaṇṇam angu kaṇḍēn, kālvannaṁ iṇṇu kaṇḍēn*
(I.475)

IV

Sītā's Wedding

Next morning, king Janaka received Viśwāmītra who was accompanied by the princes of Raghu race and said, 'Welcome venerable sage. Tell me, what is your wish; you can order me.' Viśwāmītra said, 'These are the sons of Daśaratha: they wish to see the great bow that is with you. Then they will go away.'

Janaka narrated how the invaluable bow was given by Rudra to his ancestor, Dēvarāta and said, 'One day, while ploughing the field, I found a child. She is named Sītā, since she rose out of the ploughshare. As she grew, I decided to give her in marriage to a man of valour. Many a prince sought her hand, but none could lift and hold the bow. Then they laid siege on Mithilā, in anger. I could ward them off with divine help. That is the story of this bow. I shall show it to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as well. If Rāma can string the bow, Sītā shall be his wife.'

'Show it to Rāma', said Viśwāmītra. The bow was brought, placed in a carriage of eight wheels and pulled again by many men. 'Here is the sacred bow, cherished by my forefathers. No divine being, nor *asura*, *rāksasa* or *gandharva* could handle it. What can humans do?' said Janaka. Viśwāmītra just said, 'Rāma, my boy, have a look at the bow.' Rāma opened the case and saw the bow. He said, 'If I touch this with my hand, I will be able to lift it and also string it.' 'Indeed',

said the sage and the king. Rāma lifted the bow casually and, as many stood to watch, he tightened the string with ease and as he stretched it the bow broke in the middle; the noise was so great that everyone did tremble.

With folded hands the king said to the sage, 'Rāma has indeed shown his skill, I see; it is wonderful, unimaginable to me. Sītā will obtain him as husband and uphold my vow. Sītā, dearer than my life, shall be Rāma's wife. With your permission, let messengers go to Ayōdhyā, address the king appropriately and bring him here.' Viśwāmitra approved.

In the auspicious time, known as *Vijaya*, Rāma went through all the rituals, along with the brothers;* all were dressed in splendour. Vasistha came and said Daśaratha was waiting. 'Let no time be wasted', said Janaka. Daśaratha led his sons to the hall.

Janaka said to the son of Kausalyā, 'This Sītā, my daughter, is your partner in *dharma*. Take her hand in yours and may you be well.' Then Janaka said, 'Come, Lakṣmana, take to wife Urmilā; Bharata, take the hand of Mandavī and Śatrughna, take the hand of Śrutakīrti.'

They all went round the fire, the king and the holy men present. The wedding concluded according to rites. Flowers fell from heaven; there was music and dance. The next morning Viśwāmitra took leave of the two kings and went away to the mountain in the North.

Kamban dwells upon the events in Mithilā at great length; spread over nearly 800 stanzas, his description is a luxurious account of the beauty of the city and its environs, the men and women whose leisure and luxury could only be spoken of in extravagant terms. Some passages of exquisite poetry and a couple of unique features may be cited.

* Janaka offered his other daughter Urmilā to Lakṣmana; accepting the proposal, Vasistha asked for the hand of the daughters of Janaka's brother Kuśadhvaṇa to wed Bharata and Śatrughna, recommending 'all the sons of Daśaratha are handsome and brave'.

The splendour of Mithilā, says Kamban, was because Sitā lived in it — Sitā of such beauty that Cupid himself could not paint her true charm, though he exerted himself with paint fondly mixt in nectar (I.483). As the bride arrives for the wedding, she is radiant; all the finest things mingle in her — the gleam of gold, the scent of flowers, the coolness of sandal-paste. She dazzles like a streak of lightning, putting to shame the swan, the heavenly maidens and even celestial ambrosia.²

As she proceeds, the avenue is strewn with flowers. Kamban has a poetic conceit: lest the tender feet of the bride should hurt, Mother Earth sprinkled flowers all along the path. The sight of Sitā evokes such wonder even in the mind of sage Viśwāmitra that he declares: 'if this were known to be the bride, with such devouring eyes, let alone the bow, wouldn't Rāma have crushed the giant hills?' But, the compliment was on both sides: the moment women had a look at Rāma, they declared, 'What folly it was to have placed the mighty bow in front of this youth! If the king wished to get Sitā married, he should have given her to him instantly.'³

All this acquires added relish in the context of what Kamban has created already, upon the entry of Rāma into Mithilā — a chance meeting between Rāma and Sitā so as to get a glimpse of each other. As he walks along the street, led by Viśwāmitra, Rāma finds Sitā standing in the balcony of the palace: their eyes meet. But, how? Kamban says, 'As the girl of infinite charm stood, he looked at her and she at him; eyes did hold in mutual grip, devouringly till senses fumbled, alike.'⁴ Hearts did change places; what avail are words? For, says the poet, when the pair that dwell in ocean's midst⁵ separated and met again, what need is there to speak?⁵

* In the preceding stanza, Kamban describes all beautifying ornaments as deriving beauty from Sitā, echoing Kālidāsa's 'ābharaṇasya ābharāṇam'.

† The scene is depicted in the mural paintings at the temple of Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.

Kamban refers to the dark sea (*Karuṇ kadal*) meaning the white sea (*Ksira sāgara*). P 2

Except for this hint of divinity, the spontaneous love of the young couple is treated at the human level, with all the conventions that belong to the noble sentiment. The pangs of separation, known as *viraha*, are manifest in both, Rāma and Sitā, as they retire. Sitā reflects, 'the man who walked before my eyes might well be a thief who entered my heart through the eye.' And at night, she says to herself, 'what sort of manhood is this that he cannot offer solace to a girl in distress?'

The other interesting feature is a portrayal of the way the women of Mithilā lined up to admire Rāma as he went in procession, wholly charmed by his presence. "Yet, who could see all of him?" says Kamban, for, 'those who saw his shoulder saw only that, they that saw the lotus feet decked with heroic anklet saw the feet, and it was the same with those that saw the arm. They all seemed like religious sects that perceive Him in diverse forms.'

Paraśurāma

Daśaratha and his sons were returning to Ayodhya. Evil omens began to show, all of a sudden. Vasistha interpreted it as some imminent danger. "They saw the emerging figure of Paraśurāma, bow in hand and red with rage.

Paraśurāma, son of Jamadagni, spoke: 'O Rāma, son of Daśaratha, I have heard of your valour and how you broke the bow. So, I am here with another bow. Handle this and show your might. Then I shall offer you combat.' Frightened, Daśaratha pleaded, 'Please calm yourself, great man, have mercy on my sons.' Ignoring him, Paraśurāma addressed Rāma, 'Of the two great bows made by Viśvakarmā, you did

* The stanza that follow are in the style of Alvars — apostrophic appeals by the girl in *viraha*, to the birds and the Moon for mercy.

The format, known as *Ulā*, is an early Tamil convention inspired by Āśvaghoṣa's 'Buddha charitam' in Sanskrit. Kālidāsa employs the convention in 'Raghuvamśam' (Aja's ceremonial ride).

manage one that was with Śiva. Here, see if you can string this Viṣṇu's bow and prove yourself a Kṣatriya.'

'I have heard of you and your achievements', said Rāma, 'but you are mistaking me, a Kṣatriya, for a man bereft of valour. Now, you will see my power.' Rāma lifted the bow with ease, set the arrow and spoke in anger, 'You are a Brahmin, respected by Viśvāmitra; so, this arrow I cannot aim at your life. Tell me which — your carriage or the fruits of your penance? — I should destroy with this.' In a low voice Paraśurāma replied, 'This carriage I need, because I made a promise not to spend a night on Earth; with intense speed I shall go to the hills. What I gained in all the world through penance of mine, you may vanquish.' As Rāma let go of the arrow, the sage said, 'I shall go to the Mahendra hill. I am not ashamed to be humbled by you — the lord of the three worlds.' He then walked round Rāma and walked away. Daśaratha embraced the son and all were happy; they proceeded to Ayōdhyā amidst rejoicing.

Kamban adds that Paraśurāma gave his blessings to Rāma, 'May all your undertakings meet with success, O divine man of gem-like radiance! You are the refuge for all men, grant me leave to go.'

That recognition of divinity in Rāma gains significance when it is recalled that Paraśurāma himself is deemed to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu — an earlier one. The episode is symbolic of the transfer of power, from the lesser Rāma to the nobler one.

Notes

1. *Iyam Sitā mama sūtā sahadharmachari tai a pativrata mahābhāgā chāyēva anugatā sati*
2. *Ponnin oli poovin verl cāndupodi ceetam munnin nizhal annavaltan mēnti oli māna nnamum arambaiyarum āramizhdum nāṇa nannaval trunda manimaṇḍapam adaindāl*

3. Vallal maṇattai mahizhndanan enrāl
koḷ ena munbu koduppadaḷ allāl
vellalmanattinan ivvillai eḍuttu ap-
pillaimun tītadu pēdamai enbār
(I.695)
4. Ennarū nalattināl inaiyal ninruzhī
kaṇṇoḍu kaṇ tṇai kavvi, onrai onṇu
uṇṇavum, nilaiṇerādu uṇarvum onṇida
annalum nōkkinān, aṇaḷum nōkkināl
(I.514)
5. Marungilā nangaiyum vasat-il aiyanum
orungia irandu uḍarku uyir onṇu āiyinār
karunkadal palliyil kalavi neengippōi
pirindavar kooḍinal pēsul vēndumō?
(I.517)
6. Tōl kaṇḍār tōlē kaṇḍār, toḍukazhal kamalam anna
tāl kaṇḍār tālē kaṇḍār; tadakkai kaṇḍarum ahde
vāḷkonḍa kaṇṇār yārē vadivinaḷ mudiyak-kaṇḍār?
oozhkonḍa samayattu annān uruvu kaṇḍarai ottār
(I 1081)

V

Rāma to be Crowned

After some time, one day Daśaratha told Bharata, 'Yudhājīt, your uncle, has come to take you to Kēkaya'. Bharata set out to go, accompanied by Śatrughna.

When Bharata had gone, Rāma and Lakṣmana took care of the father; at his instance, Rāma began to attend to important functions. People admired him for his kind and pleasant ways, with a smile and a word of greeting. Calm within, he would speak no rude word even if he was addressed rudely. One and all liked him much and spoke well of him for his deeper knowledge of the goals of life — *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. Such a man of wisdom and valour, the world did wish to have as chief.

Watching him grow so well, Daśaratha began to reflect, 'When will I see this son of mine, so dear, duly crowned? People love him more than me; he is better than me. I would entrust the land to him, so I might in old age look to heaven.'

He took counsel with his ministers and decided to crown the son of merits true. People and chiefs of *janapadas* were summoned soon. The king spoke, clear and loud, 'This kingdom, handed down by Ikshvāku race, I have held for long, as well as I could. This aging body needs to rest. I wish to retire, make my son care for public good. You know my eldest son is of virtue and valour great. In the hour of *Puṣya* star, I wish to crown him prince.' Joyously they said, one and all — they knew his mind —, 'far gone in years, you should

place Rāma on the throne'.

'Why do you want my son as king, when I have been a righteous ruler of this land?' he asked, as if he did not know. Then they spoke of Rāma, his virtues great, with truth and *dharma* as his guide. 'I am pleased', said the king, 'that you would like to have as king my dear son, eldest of them.' He then told the holy men, in presence of all, 'This month of Chaitra is good; flowers are in plenty all around. Let all things be set for the coronation of Rāma.' Then he told Sumantra, 'Bring Rāma quickly here.'

Standing on the terrace, as he watched the son arrive by chariot, Daśaratha was not content though seeing him for long — the handsome Rāma, captivating people's eyes and hearts. Rāma stood with folded hands and announced himself. The king turned and took the son in embrace, then made him sit.

'You are born of eldest wife to me, worthy son of worthy woman. You are dear to me, Rāma, excellent in qualities. So, take the crown when *Pusya* is in ascendance. By nature you are modest. Yet, my love for you demands that I tell you this: keep your senses in check, free of anger or lust. Keep the men in court — ministers and all — happy.' Rāma bowed and left.

Some friends of Rāma — those who wished him well — ran and reported all to Kausalyā. Gold and cows and gems galore, she ordered gifts to those who gave her happy news.

When all had left, Daśaratha held converse again with his counsels and resolved, 'Tomorrow is *Pusya*; let my son wear the crown tomorrow. Rāma of lotus eyes to be the prince! And so, he sent for Rāma once more.

When Rāma heard of this second call, he had a doubt. 'Why am I called again? Tell me the truth', he asked. The man just said, 'The king wants you.'

The king bade him sit and said to Rāma, 'I have lived long, having tasted all in life. I have nothing more to do, except to have you crowned. Now, you should do as I say. All are keen to have you as their king and so, I am crowning you as prince.

But I have had dreams that forebode evil — flaming torches falling off the sky. Those who know the stars are afraid this would mean the death of king or some such danger. So, while my senses desert me not, take the crown. Tomorrow is the day. You and your wife should spend the day in fast and prayer...there often is, in functions like this, many a hindrance. While Bharata is away from here, the time is ripe for you to take the crown, I think. No doubt, he is good and free of passion, respects elders and follows *dharma*. Yet, the human mind is fickle, I think, — even in the good and virtuous. Now, you may go; tomorrow is the coronation.”¹ Rāma bowed to the father and returned home. As soon as he reached, he went to see his mother. Sumitrā and Sitā had already gathered there.

‘Tomorrow is to be my coronation; that is father’s decree. Sitā and I have to fast at night. Get all the rituals of good luck made ready for me and Valdēhi.’ Kausalyā spoke in joyous tears, ‘May you live long, my son. Make my relatives happy, and Sumitrā’s too. Indeed you were born to me in a lucky star.’ Rāma smiled and said to Lakṣmana, ‘Come, Lakṣmana, rule with me this kingdom; you are my second self and luck befalls you now.’

Kamban’s version is a straight narrative of the main events: Daśaratha’s consultation with the ministers, Vasiṣṭha’s speech of approbation on behalf of all, Daśaratha’s meeting with Rāma and Rāma’s consent. In the process, the dramatic tension that Vālmiki creates is missing — the anxiety of the king to speed up the coronation when Bharata is away, his nervous summons to Rāma more than once to confide in him the fears that assail the agitated mind, Rāma’s curious doubt on being called again, and so on, all of which is meaningfully embedded in Vālmiki.

The devotee in Kamban gains over the poet in him, as he emphasises the concept of the monarch as one wedded to the land, which leads to the comparison with Viṣṇu whose consort’s are Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī (Lakṣmī and Earth). Thus, Daśaratha says, ‘Having witnessed the marriage of my

illustrious son with Lakṣmī, in the form of Sitā, I wish to see him wed the maiden known as Earth.' Vasiṣṭha responds in similar terms: Rāma is the one whom Śrī and Bhū look upon as life-companion.

Later, Daśaratha tells Rāma, 'I have a favour to ask of you; take the crown' (1373). Stanza 1382 which sums up Rāma's reaction says, 'neither delighted, nor indifferent, he took it as the king's order'.*

Kausalyā's closeness to Sumitrā is also indicated in Kamban; on hearing the news of Rāma's coronation, the two proceed to the temple of Viṣṇu and offer prayers to the Lord, flanked by Śrī and Bhū on either side. 'Grant my son Your grace' prayed she — she who had held in her womb the One who contained in Himself the entire universe, says Kamban, sustaining the idea.

Notes

1. *Viprōṣṭtascha Bharataḥ yāvadēva purādītaḥ
tāvadēva abhisēkas tē prāptakālō matō mama
kānam khalu sa ām vrittē bhrātā te bharataḥ sthitaḥ
jyēsthānuvarti dharmātmā sanukrōsō jitēndriyaḥ
kim nu chittam manuṣyārāṇi anityam iti mē matih*
(II.4-25-26)

* Here Kamban is anticipating what Vālmiki is to observe later, when Rāma receives the news of his banishment, viz., *nālaksayata rāmasya kīnchit ākāram ānanē*.

VI

Counsel of the Crooked Maid

Ayōdhyā was in festive mood, decked in splendour all around; women and children, one and all, waited for the rising Sun and Rāma's crowning fete.

Rāma took a ritual bath and, with his wife, made offerings to Nārāyana, while people made the city bright. The royal highway was made to shine; lights were placed on trees, in all the streets. In little groups people talked of petty things, but full of praise for the Chief.

A maid she was, unknown; she had grown with Kalkēyi — a distant kin. Mantharā went up the terrace — just by chance — and saw the town, flags and festoons all around; smell of sandalwood filled the air.

She asked a woman who stood nearby, 'Why is she, Rāma's mother, dressed so well, joyously making gifts in cash to one and all? Why are people merry, as never before?' That maid gladly told of Rāma's luck, 'the faultless prince, Rāma, wears the crown tomorrow, in *Pusya* star'.

She could not bear to hear; Mantharā went down the steps, burning hot with rage. What she saw was evil. She went to Kalkēyi, stretched in bed, and said, 'Arise, you fool! danger is at hand. You brag about your fortune; your fortune is gone, like streams of water when summer comes.'

Spoken thus, so rudely, Kalkēyi asked the crooked maid, 'Is anything wrong? You seem so pale and sad.' As she heard the words, soft and sweet, Mantharā was filled with anger.

Clever in speech, the crooked one — her well-wisher — grew more pale and said, 'Something terribly wrong, my lady! your ruin has begun. The king is making over the crown to Rāma. In fear and grief, therefore, I have come for your sake — fiery like the fire. Any grief of yours will bring me grief and, of course, flourish you will, I will too. Now, why is it you cannot see the cruel ways of monarchy, though born in royal line and wed to royal chief? He talks of *dharma* — husband of yours: he is but knave. He talks so sweet, but acts so cruel. Simple as you are, you know him not and get so cheated. Worthless words he has for you, but wealth and status he heaps on her, Kausalyā, today. The evil man sent your son to your father's place and tomorrow, he will firmly plant Rāma upon the throne. He is your foe, though he calls himself a husband. The one you take in your lap, innocently, is a venomous cobra. What a cobra or a slighted foe can do, he has done to you today. If Rāma is declared king, that will be the end of you and your kin. So, save yourself, your son and me.'

Calm in face, reclining still, the noble woman gave the crooked one a precious jewel and said, 'This is for having brought the happy news; most delightful it is. What more can I give you? I see thee, both alike — Rāma and Bharata. So it is that I am pleased that the king should make him king.¹ Never indeed did anything come from you, more pleasing far than what you said today. Choose, what more you want of me.'

Mantharā showed disgust, let go of the jewel, and said in anger mixed with sadness, 'Why this joy, out of place, silly woman? You do not see yourself engulfed in grief. The lucky one is Kausalyā whose son will take the throne ceremoniously tomorrow. And, you will stand beside, serving her like maid.'

Finding her still displeased, Kalkēyī said more in praise of Rāma's goodness. 'Well-versed in *dharma*, respectful of elders too, Rāma knows of proper deed and always speaks clean and true. He is, besides, eldest of sons; so he must be king. How do you get worked up thus, O crooked one,

because you heard of it? In fact, Rāma respects me more than Kausalyā.'

Mantharā was intensely sad. Deep and hot she sighed and said to Kaikēyī, 'Viewing things perverse, in your folly, you do not know your self, though you sink in the sea of sorrow. Rāma will be king; and then his son. Bharata gets left out of royal line. Why I came to you, you do not see; you give me gifts, gloating on her prosperity — the other wife's. Once he becomes king, Rāma will surely send your son, Bharata, to far off lands or even to the other world. Already you have sent him to his uncle's place. Only closeness leads to bondage — even in plants. Lakṣmana is close to Rāma, as everyone knows Rāma will, no doubt, do much harm to Bharata. So, let your son go directly from his uncle's palace, into a jungle. You should guard Bharata from Rāma. Besides, how will Kausalyā pardon you for all the insults you heaped on her, so vain in your power?'

Thereupon, Kaikēyī was red with rage. She sighed and said, 'Today I shall send Rāma into the jungle and quickly place Bharata on the throne. But look, how? By what device, Mantharā, can Bharata gain the crown and not Rāma — never?'

The evil-minded Mantharā spoke, 'Well, I shall tell you that, as well.' Kaikēyī sat up and said, 'Tell me how, how Bharata can be king, not Rāma, ever.'

'You went with him, the king, when he fought the war between Dēvas and Asuras. Pleased with you, for service then, he gave you boons — two of them — which you could take when you wished. Ask for them, now; implore your husband. Ask for the crown for Bharata's sake and ask for Rāma to be sent away for fourteen years. Enter now the angry mood and lie on the floor in shabby clothes. Don't look at him, nor speak. Of course, you are dear to him, I have no doubt. For your sake the king will even jump into fire; he can't see you angry. To please you, he will give up life — this emperor. Dullard! know your strength and the luck that awaits you now. He might offer gold and gems; do not let your mind

wander. The boons, — remind him of the boons. Once he is banished, Rāma will cease to be Rāma; Bharata will be the king. By the time Rāma returns from the jungle, your son would have struck roots full deep.'

Evil nonsense was taken as sense and Kaikēyi spoke with cheer, 'O crooked one! I did not know how great and wise you are; you are the only one who cares for me, always. I did not know what the king was bent upon. You are a lotus amidst all the twisted *kubjas*.' Golden necklace I will grant, once my son takes the crown and Rāma is gone to jungle. Decked in silk and gold, you will ride a special coach — the envy of all around.'

Though flattered thus, she replied, 'Look for the king. It is no use raising a dam after the floods.' With that prod from Mantharā then, Kaikēyi, the woman of golden hue, took off the strings of gold and pearls alike. She sat on the floor and said to Mantharā, 'You may even carry the news to the king that I am dead, here in this room: Bharata shall wear the crown, only when Rāma goes away.' The Emperor's wife sat depressed, like starry night drowned in darkness.

Kamban's introduction of Mantharā prepares the reader for the events to follow. First, her discordant entry while the city is in joy is underlined in the phrase, 'the evil one of crooked mind' (*kodu manakkonni*) and she seems to enter as if by evil plot of Ravana (II 1445). Secondly, she is said to recall how Rāma, when a child, shot a lump of mud at her hunch-back.

Talking to Kaikēyi, the 'poison-like crook' (as Kamban refers to her, more than once) plays on the rivalry between the eldest and the youngest of the queens. Her opening card is, 'fallen is your status: Kausalyā is the lucky one, clever as she is.'² When she talks of Rāma's coronation, she is rewarded by Kaikēyi, but she duly returns the gift and says, 'Innocent and naive as you are, you may stand this fall and

* The poet puns on the word which means 'hunch-back' as well as the plant, *Tachyranthes aspera*.

bear the grief, with the son of yours. I refuse to be a maid to that other wife's maids' (II.1460). Having thus worked on jealousy, Mantharā talks of Bharata and his bad luck. In deep sympathy she says apostrophically, 'Bharata, my dear! what can you do, with such an evil father and a mother who does you harm?'³

Kaikēyī retorts, 'You are not a friend; nor good to me, nor to my son, not even to yourself, strictly seen. You say what you like, stupid one! — ill-fate holds your mind.'⁴ Furthermore, Kaikēyī threatens to cut off the tongue that spoke such thoughts; she dismisses the maid. But the crook does not leave. Instead, she declares, 'I cannot fail to tell you what is good for you' and touches the feet, to deliver the final blow.

'The heart so pure did change', says Kamban, 'and she gave up grace and mercy.' The poet adds the comment that because of her heartlessness it is that today all the world can drink the nectar of Rāma's glory; there were also the driving forces — the design of the *dēvas*, the sin of the *rākṣasas* and the holy penance of the *ṛṣis* (all of them working towards the same end).⁵ The stanza (1484) may be read as an implied exoneration of Kaikēyī; otherwise, it seems extraneous, a distraction to the flow of dramatic narrative. However, passages such as this reflect the problem of the poet who undertakes an epic, pertaining to divine personages — a problem that is more manifest in later poets handling Rāmāyaṇa.

An interesting point of dramatic value is that in Vālmiki's narrative Mantharā does not suggest the banishment of Rāma — not initially, nor directly. But, cleverly though, she talks of the danger to Bharata, once Rāma becomes king, insinuating that it were better for Bharata to escape into the forest, which evokes the retort from Kaikēyī, 'I shall send Rāma to the forest', without any idea of how to do it. It is in the later versions that Mantharā acquires an increasing share of the blame for sending Rāma away from Ayōdhyā.

The Old Man and the Young Wife

To tell the news she would love to hear, the king went to see the lovable one. He saw her on the floor, as if in grief, — he, the old man and she, the young wife; he, the innocent and she, the wickedly intent. Like the elephant male that soothes the mate who has been hit by hunter's arrow, he began to stroke her soft with his hands. The doting man told the young woman, whose eyes were like lotus petals, 'I have not known you to be angry thus. With whom are you cross, my dear? Or, has anyone dared insult? To see you lie on the floor, it hurts me sore. Many a doctor waits on me, you know; tell me, what can all you? Or, tell me who should do what you wish; or, who has done what you hate. Would you like some guiltless one to hang or, a guilty one to get reprieve? Would you want a beggar turn a man of wealth or, a rich man brought to naught? I am at your command, and all my kin. Tell me what you wish.'⁶

Thus assured, she thought of saying the terrible thing; but, began to hold him bound more tight. 'None has hurt me, no. I have something in mind, which you can do — if you wish. Recall the vow you made and I will tell you then what my prayer is.' Drawn to her, out of love, the king said with a smile, 'Silly girl! don't you know none is dearer far than you to me, except that man, Rāma — noble among men? So, tell me, Kaikeyī, what you think is proper. You know your strength; you should have no doubt. I will do what you want; I swear by all my virtue.'

Pleased with that, she spoke her mind — death-like words: 'May the gods listen — the Sun and Moon, the Earth and all — as you speak and grant my wish, which you vowed. Listen, O gods! the man of truth, this great man, grants my wish.' Then she turned to him — the man in love, ready to grant — and said, 'The two boons you gave me once, I want them now. Listen; keep all the plans that have been made to get Rāma crowned; in that very coronation, let Bharata take his place. For nine years and five, let Rāma be in Dandaka

dense, in flaxen clothes and matted hair.'

He heard the terrible words; the mighty king trembled, like a deer before the tigress. 'O Hell!', he said and sighed. When senses came, with fiery eyes he said, 'Foul woman! what is the sin that Rāma did to you, or I for that matter? He adores you as much as his mother and to him you seek to bring disaster! I have, indeed, brought you home to see myself destroyed!...What is the fault for which I can forsake this son, so dear to me? I may forgo all my wealth, even Kausalyā and Sumitrā too. But, if I do not see him I am not myself. Without him, my Rāma, my life will forsake my body, though the world might do without the Sun and plants might live waterless. So, dispel this resolve — sinful thought — I shall touch your feet with my head. Grant me this, I pray.' He wailed as if in helpless state — the ruler of the land; in clutches tight his heart she held. He fell at her feet but did not reach the outstretched limbs.

Free of fear, though fearful-looking, she pressed her point—the boon. 'You speak no sense, O King! firmly fixt to truth, you are. How do you seek to cancel the boon?'

Spoken thus, the king became angry and said, 'When I am dead and Rāma gone, may you live in happy state, you vulgar woman! If I tell the truth that Rāma goes to jungle, to please this wife of mine, none will think it true; defeat and lasting ill-fame shall be mine.'⁷

The Sun was gone; night was growing, as the king kept looking at the sky. He tried to bring her round, again. He said, 'Take pity on an old man, noble lady! — a man who is king, but helpless in your hands. Come, my dear girl! you are my darling indeed.'

The sinful one told the fallen man, 'First you planned to do a sinful thing, then you gave me word and now you roll on the ground. You must stick to what you say. Those who know of *dharma* true, speak of it as nothing but truth. Sibi, you know, gave his flesh to the hawk and saved the dove; Alarka gave his eyes to the man who begged, and many like them. If what you promised you will not do, I shall kill myself, here

and now.'

The king was dazed; he did not seem to see. Standing up somehow, he said to her, 'The hand I took in holy vow, with fire as witness, I give up now; and your son, with you.' Stung by that and roused in anger, she said, 'How do you speak such venomous things? What you do is: send for Rāma and send him off, place my son upon the throne and rid me of that wife of yours.'

Prodded thus, like noble horse pricked too often by the spurs, the king said to Kalkēyi, 'Bound I am, in bond of *dharma*, but my senses sink. I wish to see my son, the eldest one — Rāma dear.' As the king could not speak, she told Sumantra, 'I wish to see the charming Rāma; bring him quick.'

Kamban's account of the scene in Kalkēyi's chamber moves on a different plane and in fewer words. As Kalkēyi asks for the boons, Daśaratha smiles innocently and says, 'I will do what you want, leave nothing undone', and hastens to add, 'I swear in the name of Rāma, YOUR son' — a phrase that heightens the dramatic irony, reminding her how close he is to her. In the passage that follows, the poet describes her in harsh epithets — 'the evil-most of all evils' and 'cobra-like in cruelty' (II 1505).

The poet evokes pathos, with some telling phrases in Tamil, when Daśaratha pleads helplessly at the feet of hers. 'Your son will not take the crown', begins Daśaratha in an attempt to isolate her and adds, 'the world will not agree, nor the chiefs, nor the gods.' Then he cajoles her, 'You need my eyes? I give them now; you need my life? it is yours today. But, my dear girl — lovely daughter of Kēkaya — take the land for yourself; forget the other point.'^{*} He even asks for it as a boon, in return for the two he gave; 'even the devil does melt, to those who beg', he adds.

* Kamban makes further extension of an idea that is found in the Southern rescension of Vālmiki, viz., Daśaratha swears in the name of Rāma (*ramēna tēśapē vachanakṛtyām*).

She does not falter — ‘the wicked one without an equal’. He begs, in short phrases, ‘Your son will rule and you will reign in style; all the land is yours. I give; you have my word. But, my son — my life, the apple of my eye, the one whom every living being loves — let him not get out. Please concede.’⁹ The words ‘your son’ and ‘my son’ (*nin makan, en makan*) reflect the alienation that has taken place between man and wife.

Notes

1. *Rāmē vā Bharatē vā vīśēsam nōpalakṣayē
tasmāt tushtāsmi yadrāja Rāmam rājye abhīśēksyati*
(II.7:30)
2. *veezhndadu nin nalam, ttruvum veezhndadu
vāzhndanal Kōsalai madiytināl enṛā!*
(II.1454)
3. *tandatyum koḍiyan, narrāyūm teeyalal
endatyē! Bharatanē! en celvāi? enṛāl*
(II.1466)
4. *enakku nallatyum allai nee, en makan Bharatan
tanakku nallatyum allai; attarumamē nōkktin
unakku nallatyum allai. vandu oozhvtinai toonda
manakku nallana collinai, madiytlā manattol!*
(II.1471)
5. *arakkar pāvamum allavar iyarriya aramum
turakka, nāl aru! tuṇandanal tomozhi maḍamān;
irakkam inmai anrō inru tṭvulakangal Irāman
parakkum tol puhazh amudinai-p paruhuktnṛaduvē?*
(II.1484)
6. *avadhyō vadhyatām vā vadhyah kō vā vīmuchyatām
daridrah kō bhavatvādhyō dravyavān vāpyaktchanah*
(II.10:10)
7. *Kalkēyyāh prtyakāmēna Rāmah pravrajītō vanam
yadi satyam braveemi etad asatyam bhovīṣyati*
(II.11:6)
8. *kaṇṇē veṇḍinum eeyakkadavēn, en
uṇṇēr āv! vēṇḍinum ttrē unadanrō?
peṇṇē! varmai kēkayan mānē! peruvāyēl
maṇṇē kol nee; matrayadu onṛum maṛa, enṛān*
(II.1522)

9. *nin makan ālvān, nee inidu ālvāt; nilam ellām
un vayam āmē, āludī, tandēn, urat kuṇṇēn.
en makan, en kan, en uyīr, ellā uyīrkatkum
nan makan, inḍa nādu travamaḷ naya, enrān*

(II.1526)

VII

The Great Day

As the Sun emerged in clear sky on Puṣya day, pots of holy water brought from near and far, in jars of gold and silver ware, were kept ready for Rāma's coronation. The chariot bright stood by, decked in splendour; drawn by horses white, it had a parasol of moon-like white. Leading all the groups of men were the eight young girls, richly dressed — harbingers of prosperity.

'The Sun is up, all is set for the coronation; but, we do not see the king. Who will go and tell the king?' said they. Sumantra went to see.

When he stood beside the door and raised a chant, to wake the king, 'I am not asleep', said the king, 'go and bring Rāma here.'

Joyously excited, Sumantra went past the royal highway and reached Rāma's palace in all its splendour; he saw the crowds as well — common men and noble ones.

Upon a beautiful seat, with Sitā by his side, Rāma sat; he seemed like Kubēra, lord of wealth. Radiant he was, with sandal-paste upon his chest. The messenger bowed in humble form and said, 'Noble son of Kauṣalyā! your father wants to see you now. He is with Kaiṣēyī; go quickly there.' Full of joy, Rāma turned to Sitā, and said, 'Look, my dear, the king and queen are jointly planning something, sure, for the function now. She must have asked for it on my behalf — the liberal one. Let me go without delay; you be here, in cheer

and joy with your friends.' Sitā saw him off at the gate, wishing him good luck.

Excitement filled the air as Rāma rode the town, shining in all glory. He saw and greeted all and heard them say happy words like, 'Here goes Rāma; our wish is done. If he should rule, people's gain it is.' Rāma heard their blessing words as well; he bowed to all of them.

Inside the palace, Rāma saw the father sitting pale and dry; Kaikēyī was beside. As he touched the feet of father and of Kaikēyī, the king in tears called, 'Rāma'. He could neither look, nor talk. Rāma got a shock, like having stepped on a cobra, as he saw the frightful face so strange. Watching how the father sighed, Rāma thought what could be the cause. He asked Kaikēyī, 'Have I caused offence? Tell me, please, why is he so cross with me? Is he unwell, or sore with anyone else — my brothers? Or, did you say something harsh? Tell me true. This sickly face is strange, and why? Tell me what he wants — the king — and I shall obey, I promise. Rāma speaks no double-talk.'

To that man of truth, the vulgar one spoke these terrible words: 'Your father gave me once, when I stood by him in war, two boons by which, I asked him now — the kingdom for Bharata and a journey for you today to Dandakāranya. If you want to make him true to word he gave, you should go to forest now, years nine and five to spend. Give up the crown; with matted hair and ochre robe, while you live — seven years and seven more — let Bharata rule Kōsala here.'

Rāma heard the words so harsh -- like death, indeed; he did not stir. 'So be it: I shall go', he said, 'but, tell me why the king is so unhappy. There is no need for you to fear; I shall go, rest assured. The only thing that hurts me now is why the king did not tell me this himself — Bharata's coronation. Gladly would I have given him this, with none to spur. Here I go: let my sage go to bring Bharata here.'

She began to hustle him now. 'Then you should lose no time', she said, 'the king is filled with shame; he will not eat, nor bathe, till you are gone.'² 'O Hell!' cried the king and

fainted. Rāma raised the king but said to her, 'Status and wealth is not my goal; I do not wish to live that life. *Dharma* is my creed and *ṛsis* are my equals, you should know.³ Wait till I can take my mother's leave and ask Sitā's consent.'

Rāma then walked round the father and Kaikeyī as well. Circling all the holy pots, Rāma walked; he did not see the surging crowd, nor the man in tears that followed him — Lakṣmana. No change, in mind or heart, was seen in him — the man who left the land and sought to go into jungle; he excelled all.⁴ He bore his grief and went to break the sad news to mother.

Whereas Vālmiki lets the irony of the situation — public rejoicing and private feud, in mutual unconcern — play upon the reader, Kamban laces his narrative with comment that is interpretative. Thus, as the day breaks the poet paints it as the shy exit of Lady Night who does not wish to face the men, being ashamed of what a woman had done — a merciless act. As the sky grew clear of stars, the poet says, it seemed as if the canopy of pearls was ripped apart, ere the man of lovely eyes, like smiling lotus — Viṣṇu indeed — could wear the crown.

Yet, the public are shown in joyful mood; festive air is all around. As Rāma goes to the step-mother's chamber, the public comment is, 'This lad was brought up by Kaikeyī, lucky one — not by his mother. Who can tell how great is her joy, having heard that he shall rule the Earth?'⁵

The scene of Rāma's encounter with Kaikeyī occupies less than eight stanzas; Kamban makes no reference to the boons but lets Kaikeyī mention it to Rāma as the king's wish that he should go to the forest, yielding place to Bharata. Rāma says, 'Even if it were not the command of the king, would I refuse an order of yours? If my younger brother should be king, is it not as good as my own luck? Here, I go today; grant me leave.'⁶ The poet's comment flows, 'the lovely face of Rāma — ever so bright — seemed like lotus blossom, fresh in bloom, when he heard those words' (II. 1602).*

* In underlining Rāma's readiness to accept renunciation, Kamban carries it much farther than Vālmiki.

'Who Can Fight This Fate?'

Walking towards his mother's chamber, hall by hall, Rāma saw the throngs of people — holy men and joyous youths and children too; he bowed to all of them. There she sat, beside the fire, making all the sacred chants.

'May you live long, attain fame in righteous ways. Look how the king has kept his word, making you the king today!' she said. Rāma replied, 'Indeed you do not know what terrible thing has happened now; it means much grief to you and Sitā, and Lakṣmana as well. Fourteen years I shall live in jungle far, like a sage — no meat, but roots and fruits. The king now gives the crown to Bharata and sends me off to Dandaka.'

In grief she fell, like a plantain tree. As Rāma raised his mother, she said, 'If no son were born to me, the sadness would have been just of childlessness. Happiness and joy I never had, through husband's glory. My hope was in you, my son. I should now listen to words of scorn from all the other wives. I stood neglected even with you around; once you go, it will be hell. Those who serve me now will turn the face without a word, in line with that son of Kaikeyī.'

As she wailed, it was Lakṣmaṇa who spoke. 'I do not like this either, that Rāma is to give up the crown and leave, meekly bound by the woman's words. The king is old, perverse and ever held by senses; a slave to lust, what is it he will not say?' This man who is banished now, what is it that he has done as crime? In all the world I cannot find a single man who finds a fault in Rāma. Which man of righteous ways would discard a son for no reason? The king has grown childish now; why take his word as royal decree? Rāma, before anyone knows what this means, take command and rule this place, with my help. Let me see who can stand, when I take bow in hand. If anyone does, I shall make this city now rid of man. Making foes of you and me, would anyone dare to give the crown to Bharata? But, my lady! if Rāma goes to jungle deep, take it from me I shall lead. Yet, see my valour and let Rāma too.'

Kausalyā said to Rāma, 'You have heard what your brother said. You may do so, if you please. But, you should not go leaving me thus in grief. Knowing *dharma* as you do, if you wish to practise *dharma* you should stay and serve your mother. You should respect me as much as the king; I do not grant you leave to go. Life is pointless without you. If you insist, I shall shed my life and the sin will be upon you, sure.'

The man of *dharma* spoke these judicious words to sorrowing mother: 'There is no power in me to deviate from father's word, I beg of you; I wish to go. I am not the first one to follow what the father says; look at all of them in my line, Sagara down. *Dharma* is supreme; there is in it all the truth.' Then to Laksmāna, he said, 'give up this war-like mind; take to *dharma* and follow in my way of thought.'

As he stood, heaving like a giant snake, Śumitrā's son heard this again, 'You must act in such a way that she will doubt me not the least — that mother who is pained about my coronation. Her anxious grief I cannot bear to see anymore. Her mind will be at ease only when I am gone... Who can fight this fate, Laksmāna, which we cannot see — except in deeds and acts? In joy and grief, fear and rage, loss and gain, all that happens is the work of fate.'⁸

As Rāma spoke, Laksmāna heard it all; his head he often bowed, filled alike with joy and sadness. He knit his brows and sighed, like hissing cobra angered out of its hole. A lion in rage he seemed — awful sight it was.

Flinging forth his hand and swaying it like elephant's trunk, he shook his neck and shoulder, looked around and told his brother, 'Out of place it is — this confusion; it is caused by faulty view of *dharma*, held in innocence unsuspectingly. How can a man like you, in clear mind, talk like this? A vallant man of Ksatriya race, how can you thus praise this fate? You do not suspect the two — the sinful pair. Do you know there are subtle frauds of *dharma*? I hate this *dharma*, in whose spell your mind is thrown in conflict, when someone else is asked to crown, though all was done to make

you king. It is the confused man of no valour that fate can sway; those who know themselves brave and strong do not worship fate. Let all the people see today the strength of man and that of fate; the issue will be clear, once for all. Those that planned so wrongly this forest-life for you, fourteen years in all they shall live in the jungle. I shall cut off that hope which father has and hers as well.'

As he spoke and threatened to kill one and all who might oppose, Rāma wiped his tears and told Laksmāna, 'Understand that I am bound by father's word; and this is the proper course for me, my dear.'

Kamban reserves the meeting between Rāma and Laksmāna to a later scene. However, the notion of human life as torn between *dharma* and fate is embedded in the opening stanza of the chapter on Rāma's exit from Ayōdhyā (*Nahar neengu patalam*). 'Neither flanked by chowrie fans, nor beneath the shade of canopy white, he walked alone — led by fate, as *dharma* lingered far behind — and stood before her whose heart was blooming in the hope that the son of cloud-like hue would come with crown on head.'¹

Asked if anything was wrong, Rama tells Kausalya, 'Your dear son,* my faultless brother, Bharata is to take the crown. Whereupon, she replies, 'Though there is a rule of succession, he is good — better than you' and adds, 'not to defy what father says is but *dharma*. Give the kingdom to your brother and live as friends.' But, when she learns of the banishment, she wails, 'Was it all deceit, my son, that you were told to rule the land?' and then she cries aloud, 'Where is *dharma* — not for me, O gods?'

Kausalyā is then depicted as going to see Daśaratha, in the hope of preventing Rāma's exile, granting Bharata's right to rule. On seeing him in Kalkēyī's chamber, all she does is to wail and mourn, she does not speak to the other woman

* Step-mothers usually refer to all the sons of the man as 'my son' in Indian languages; the poet adds irony, hinting at the cordiality that prevailed, until rivalry overtook.

Vasistha arrives and he is told by Kalkēyi all that passed. The sage condemns her as cruel saying, 'who would ever be crueller than you?'

(There is difference between Vālmiki and Kamban in details, here — from the moment Rāma goes to see his mother, Vālmiki does not show the two women together)

Farewell to the City

As she looked at him, who was set to fulfil father's word, Kausalyā said to Rāma now, 'You have not known what sorrow is, born to me and the King, how will you bear to live on roots and fruit in jungle there?' Without you, the fire of grief will burn me soon, I will go with you, my son, where you go. How can a cow fail to follow its own calf?*

Rāma said, 'The king stands tricked by her, Kalkēyi. When I go, if you will leave him too, he will surely cease to be. As long as he lives, attend to him, that is *dharma*, eternal, true.' 'Go, my son; your mind is fixed. May it be well with you, always', she said and looked at him with noble heart. She blessed him then and said benedictions. Rāma touched her feet and went to see Sītā in her place.

Walking past the happy crowd, Rāma was slightly sullen in the face. Sītā looked at him, pale and sad; she asked, 'what is this, my lord? Isn't today the *Pusya* day and Thursday too? I see no procession now, none to fan your face, no elephant leads and where is all the canopy of gold? Your face is strange in colour too. Why?'¹⁰

'Father has turned me out today. Now listen: you are born of noble clan; you know all *dharma* and follow it as well. See how it happened, one by one. Long ago, my father made a promise true and gave to Kalkēyi, out of love, two boons. Today, as the king made ready to crown me king, the time had come to redeem the pledge. So, for fourteen years I go

* The first sign of concern for him; all along she moaned her own lot!

to live in Daṇḍaka and Bharata has been placed on throne. I have come to see you ere I go. Do not speak of me to Bharata, never; men in power dislike to hear the praise of anyone else. Nor accept special attention from him, of any kind. When I am gone, my dear, you should live an austere life.'

As he spoke some more words, Sitā said in anger, mixt in love, 'Father, mother, brother and son, and daughter too, — each has fortune, his and hers. It is but wife who shares the luck of husband, Sir. So, forest life is mine, by order! If you would go today to forest dense, I shall lead and clear the path for you. Take me, please. In weal and woe of husband, I need no guidance how to live; truly trained am I by my mother and father too. In forest life, I shall live like in father's home. Like a spinster I will serve, all the time. But I can play with you in fragrant bows of the jungle. Content to eat root and fruit, I will be no trouble to you.'

To turn her mind away, the man of *dharma* said to her, 'You are of noble birth, Sitā, but innocent. So, you must do what I say. Give up this thought of forest-life. Life is not so happy there; troubles abound. Terrible noise from lions' roar, fasting often and sleeping on the grass on uneven ground...centipedes of many kinds creeping up, insects, mosquitos and all the pests...enough of this, my dear — your plan for forest life.'

Sitā became sad; slowly, amidst tears she said, 'All the hardships which you described are indeed the merits, when your love is at hand; please know. I must go with you, as elders wish. Without you, Rāma, my life will cease. Besides, once I heard — when I lived in father's home — I have to go through forest life; that is what the stars foretold, sooth-sayers said. That time is come, I think. Devoted wife I am, sharing all the joy and grief with you. You ought to take with you the one who is a partner in weal or woe — poor me! If you decline, I shall seek the means of death — poison, fire or water.'

She begged of him in many ways, but still he declined; he tried to calm her down. While thus appeased, she spoke to him in taunting words — words mingled in love and peeve.

'What will father think of you — my father, Mithilā king — to have a woman in man's attire as his son-in-law?'¹¹ When people say Rāma shines like radiant Sun, it is untruth. Why are you so sad and nervous that you try to leave me here alone? Never have I seen or thought of anyone else but you. I must go with you: I am not like some of those who ruin the clan. And, you wish to hand me over to someone else, like a juggler on the road? You cannot go without me and it will not be a strain for me, with you, I can go through forest life, or penance deep, or to heaven. Fruits and leaves, plentiful or scarce, if you but bring and give me that, that indeed will be my nectar true.¹²

In grief and anguish she did cry for long, holding him in tight embrace. Crystal-like the tears flowed, as water running out of lotus pair. Rāma said to her, 'Heavenly bliss I do not want, if that will cause some hurt to you. No, I am not afraid. You are born to live with me this forest life. Come with me and be my mate in *dharma's* path.' Instantly, Sitā was in joy. She began to give, with all her heart, gold and wealth in charity.

Then Rāma turned to Laksmana, who was begging leave to go with him, and said, 'If you will go with me, who is there to take good care of my mother and yours as well?'

Laksmana replied, 'Bharata will do that. But, I will go with you, ahead of you, rather, with bow in hand, a hoe and basket too, to get for you every day roots and fruits and all the forest things that sages eat, while you will tread the hills with Sitā beside you.' Rāma was pleased. 'Take leave of friends', he said.

While the brothers engaged in giving gifts to young and old, there came a Brahmin, Trijata by name. He said to Rāma, 'Poor am I, O prince! my family is so large. Please cast your glance at me.' Rāma said to him in joke, 'I still have many

* This taunt, spoken in feigned anger, as well as the prediction of the astrologer (probably a concoction) might be seen as devices which the human mind can adopt in order to secure the object in view.

cows to give. Throw this stick as far as you can; all that it covers shall be for you 'The man tied his cloth tight around the loins, held his breath and threw the stick. As the man walked away with cows, Rāma said to him, 'It was said in jest, do not mind.'

Then the brothers went to see the father: Sitā was with them. People climbed on top of homes and filled all space — terrace, tower and balcony. The streets were full, hard to pass; all were sad. As Rāma passed, on foot, many spoke in grief. 'He whom the battalions would escort, he goes alone. Laksmana goes with him and Sitā too. How would anyone banish a son, even a worthless one? More so, when the entire world does stand enslaved by sheer character?' Some declaimed, 'Let us go where Rāma goes; we shall leave this city, as Rāma does.' Rāma heard it all, he seemed to smile.

'Tell the king I am here', said Rāma to Sumantra. With folded hands the messenger said to the king, 'That illustrious son of yours is waiting at the door, having given away all his wealth, ready to go to forest now. Having taken leave of all, he has come to see you now.' 'Send for all the wives of mine', said the king, 'in their midst I wish to see my son.'

When they came, Rāma was led inside. Seeing him from far — his son with folded hands — the king got up and ran to him; he did not reach but fell down in faint. Rāma raised him, with Laksmana to help, and placed him on the cot. After a while, when the king came round, Rāma said, 'I have come to take your leave. Look at me cheerfully, I am ready to go. Sitā goes with me and Laksmana too; they do not heed the reasons I gave to stop their move. Bless us all and don't be sad.' As Rāma stood in wait for leave, the king said, 'Rāma, I am bound by the bond — the boons I gave to Kalkēyi. Bind me in chains and become the king, today.'

Excellent in *dharma* code, Rāma said with folded hands, 'You should be the king, for long. I will not prove you false. I will go to live in forest.' 'May your path be trouble-free and may you come back safe. But, do not leave tonight, spend it here, with your mother and me', pleaded the father.

'Who can give me tomorrow that which accrues to me today? This country and all its wealth, which I leave, may it all be bequeathed to Bharata. Rid yourself of grief; tears should not flow. I do not care for Sitā, nor comfort, nor kingdom too; what I want is to prove you true, free of lies', said the son.

Weighed down by the word he gave (to her), the king spoke in tears and sighs, 'Let the army go with him; let the merchants go with laden carts full of grain and gold; let my treasury follow him. Let Rāma live in happy state amidst the saints and sages there and let Bharata rule in Ayōdhyā here.' As he spoke, fear spread in Kāikēyi; her voice got choked. She said, 'Like an empty cup, bereft of wine, this kingdom Bharata shall not want — emptied of all, people-less.' 'Why do you flog a laden beast?' he cried.

Doubly enraged, she said, 'In your clan it was that Sagara gave up the son, Asamanja. So, let him go, alike.' The king said, 'O Hell'; people stood ashamed, but she did not understand. Siddhārtha, the old minister, said, 'Asamanja was a stupid son, wicked as well; he found delight in drowning little ones and threw the babies into Sarayu. When all complained, the king agreed to give up son, to do justice. Now, what is the sin that Rāma did?'

Rāma said to the king, 'When I give up affluent life, what is the need for things to go with me? When a man gives away the big elephant, how can he long to keep the tethering rope? I take leave of all; let the barks be brought.'

Kāikēyi then brought the clothes of bark herself and, without a quiver, gave Rāma to wear. Rāma took off the fine clothes and wore the sage's wear; Lakṣmaṇa did likewise. Sitā grew nervous at the sight of bark. 'How do sages wear this bark?' she asked her husband; holding it beside the neck, she felt shy, embarrassed. Rāma tied it on to her. People cried and cursed the king.

'Let not Sitā go in flaxen clothes', pleaded the king. Head downcast, Rāma told the king, 'When I am gone, take care of my mother; she does not know what sorrow is.'

Grief-laden, the king did not look at Rāma. But his only thought was of Rāma. He moaned, 'I guess, in life before, I must have caused many to lose their sons or, put to torture many a life. So, this is my lot today...she tortures me and I do not die. Many go through torment for the sake of one — Kalkēyi. Rāma...' and he fainted.

A little later, when he awoke, he told Sumantra, 'Take a proper coach and escort Rāma beyond the state.' When the gorgeous coach arrived, the king said, 'Clothes and jewels and other things, bring for Sitā quickly now.'

Ready to leave for forest-life, Sitā wore the brilliant gifts. She was bright and the hall did shine. The mother-in-law took her in her arms and said, 'Exiled he stands, but my son should not be despised by you. Rich or poor, he should be divine for you.' Sitā understood; she said, 'I will do as you say. I know; I have learnt how to be towards a husband. The *veenā* cannot play, without strings; there is no cart without the wheel. Without her man, woman is joyless — even if she have hundred sons.'¹³ Noble lady! he surely is my deity. How can I despise?' Kausalyā was pleased.

Rāma, Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa walked round the king and took leave of all. Sumitrā said to her son, 'You are born to live in forest, devoted as you are. Look upon him as father and Sitā as me, look upon the forest as Ayōdhvā. Farewell to you.' Sumantra announced the chariot was ready. Gladly, Sitā got in first; with all the three, the carriage left, with sobbing men and children close behind. 'Let us see that face which will soon be scarce', 'her heart is made of steel indeed — that mother', 'Sitā is lucky, to go with him', 'Lakṣmaṇa is noble', were the things that people said.

Daśaratha came out to see the son. The wave of women's moan rose in pitch. Rāma saw, in fleeting glance, the confused king so pale, and mother behind. 'Move quickly on', he said to the charioteer. 'Wait' said the king; 'go' said Rāma. Sumantra's mind seemed as if to lie between the wheels. 'Grief must not be prolonged', said Rāma. The charioteer hied the horses when Rāma said, 'Tell the king you did not hear

(what he said), if he should tick you off.'

Weeping sounds filled the air; royal women cried, like cows deprived of their calves. The king stood gazing long, till the dust was seen of Rāma's chariot. Then he fell, pathetic in grief.

Kamban, following a different sequence of events, places the meeting of Rāma and Sītā last, preceded by Lakṣmaṇa's outburst and public resentment. On hearing the news of Rāma's exile, people comment, 'this land has sinned'; some say 'greater sin is hers — the wife's' while those who curse Fate would say, 'these eyes of ours have sinned'.¹⁴ 'No, Bharata won't take the crown' and 'the noble one will not return' were others' views. Among women, it is only sentiment that prevails; 'Alas! shall we ever see again that tender look of grace in that face of lotus eyes? What ~~Patel~~' said they — the women who trembled like the flame in lamp, when the breeze assails, as wick gets dry without supply.¹⁵

Roused to great fury, Lakṣmaṇa stands in martial dress challenging one and all to combat straight. The woman's will shall not prevail', he roars, as he paces up and down. Rāma goes up to him and asks why. 'Opposing her, the dark woman who butchered truth, I stand to have you crowned. Those who dare oppose will burn in fire of mine.'

Rāma praises him for his sense of justice; but, he adds, 'It is not the river's fault if waters get thin. So, it is not the father's fault, nor mother's, nor the other son's. This is the fault of Fate.'¹⁶ Fate? 'The Fate of Fate you shall see — my archery. It will be cleverer far than the clever ruse that she did play', says Lakṣmaṇa.¹⁷

'How can you speak such words, with a tongue that learnt the Vēdic lore?' says Rāma. They both go to Sumitrā's place and she gives him advice to look upon the forest as Ayōdhyā, Rāma as the king and Sītā as the mother.* Meanwhile, maids,

* A close translation of 'rāmam daśaratham viddhi, mām viddhi janakātma-jām; ayōdhyām atavīm viddhi, gaccha tāta yathāsukham'.

sent by Kaikeyī, are depicted as bringing the clothes of bark for them to wear. Rāma then advises that Lakṣmaṇa should stay back and take care of the parents. He replies, 'Where the water stands, fish and flower abound; life exists when the world exists. Sitā and I will live when who exists?'¹⁸

Vasiṣṭha arrives on the scene; he observes, 'The day he was to take the crown, he took to clothes of bark because of low design! If things around were guarded safe by the god of faces four himself, who can keep away what Fate will do?' (1764) Vasiṣṭha tries to stop Rāma on the ground the king would die if he should leave. Rāma remains unmoved.

He then goes to meet Sitā. As he takes leave of her, telling her what had happened, Sitā protests, 'How could you tell me to stay?' and asks, 'would that forest be more unbearable hot than for me to be away from you?' Then she wears the cloth of bark and all the three leave by chariot.

(Whether the variation in the sequence of events is by any design of Kamban or the result of interpolation or jumble of palm-leaves, it is hard to see. However, the dramatic tension achieved in Vālmiki remains unique.)

Notes

1. *Tad broohi vachanam rāṇō yadabhihāṅksitam
karisyē pratijānē cha Rāmō dvirnābhihāṣatē* (V.II.16:19)
2. *yāvat twam na vanam yātaḥ purādasmāt abhītvaram
pitā tāvat na tē Rāma' snāsyatē bhōkṣyatēpi vā* (V.II.42)
3. *nāham arthaparō dēvi lōkam āvastum utsahē
viddhi mām rishibhistulyam kēvalam dharmam āsthitam* (V.II.16:46)
4. *na vanam gantukāmasya tyajatascha vasundharām
sarvalokātigasyēva lakṣyatē chitta vikriyā* (V.II.16:49)
5. *tāi katyil vaḷarndīlan, vaḷarttadu tavattāl
kēkayan maḍantaḷ; kiḷar nālam ivan āḷa
eekatyil uvanda avvīyarkai idu enṇāl
tōhai avaḷ pēr uvakai collal aridu enbār* (K.II.1591)

6. *mannavan paṇi anṛāktiṇ num paṇi maruppenō? en
pinnavan petra celvam adīyanēn petrādu anrō?
en tni uruti appāl? iṭṭpaṇi talaīmēl konḍēn
mīn oḷṛ kānam iṇṛē pōktiṇṛēn, viḍaiyūm konḍēn*
(K.II.1604)
7. *vīpareetascha vṛddhascha vīśaiyaischa pradharshitah
nṛīpah kīm tva na brooyāt chodyamānah samarmathah*
(V.II.18:3)
8. *kaschit dātvēna Soumītrē! yōddhum utsahatē pumān
yasya na grahaṇam kinchit karmanō anyatra dṛisyaṭē
sukhaduḥkhē bhayakrōdhow labhālābhow bhavābhavow
yasya kinchit tathābhootam nanu dāvasya karma tat*
(V.II.19:19&20)
9. *kuzhaikkīṇṛa kavari tṇṛi kotṛa venkudaiyūm iṇṛi
tzhaiḥkīṇṛa viḍhi mun cella, dharumam pīn irangi ēha
mazhaikkunṛam aniyōn mowlikavittanan varum enṛu
tazhaikkīṇṛa ullattu aīṇalmun oru tamiyan•cenṛan*
(K.II.1606)
10. *na hasti chāgratah sreemāns tava lakshanapoojītah
prayāṇe lakshyatē veera! kṛishnamēghagīṛiprbhah
na cha kānchanachitram tē pasyāmi priyadarsana!*
(V.II.23:15-16)
11. *kīm tvā manyata valdēhah pītā mē mīthilādhipah
Rāma! jāmātaram prāpya sṛītyam purushavigraham*
(V.II.27:3)
12. *patram moolam phalam yat twam alpam vā yadī vā bahu
dāsyasi swayam ahrītya tan mē amṛitarasōpamam*
(V.II.27:14)
13. *nātantri vadyatē veenā nāchakrō vartatē rathah
nāpatih sukham ēdhēta yā syādapi satātmaajā*
(V.34:25)
14. *man śeida pāvam uḷadu enpār, mā malarmēl
peṇ śeida pāvam adanin peridu enbār
pun śeida nenjai viḍhi enbār, bhootalattōr
kaṇ śeida pāvam kadalin peridu enbār*
(K.II.1706)
15. *undādu neivārtu udavādu kāl eriya
nandā vīlakktiṇ nadungukīṇṛa nangaimār
cendāmarai-t tadankaṇ cevvi aruṇōkkam
andō! pīṛidumō, āh viḍhiyē! o! enbār*
(K.II.1715)

16. *nadiytn piṣṣai anṟu naṟum punal tṛmai, aṟṟē
patiytn piṣṣai anṟu, payandu nammal-p purandāl
matiytn piṣṣai anṟu. makan piṣṣai anṟu, maṇḍa!
vidhiytn piṣṣai. nee idarku ennai veṇṇaḍadu? enṟān*
(K.II.1734)
17. *kodikkum manam enganam aṟṟuvēn? kōḷ izhāttāl
matikkum matiyāl. mudal vānavarkum vālee idām
vidhikkum vidhi āhum en vil tozhil kāndi enṟān*
(K.II.1735)
18. *neer ula entn ula meenum neelamum
pār ula enṇu ula yāvum; pārpurin
nār ula dhanu ulāl! nānum seetaiyum
ār ular entn ulam? aruluvāl, enṟān*
(K II.1757)

N.B. The last passage (no 18) is an echo of Vālmiki's 'na cha Sitā
twayā heenā, na cha aham apt Raghava! muhoortam api
jeevāvō, jalān matsyātvōddhritau (II. 47:31), and the paral-
lel between 9 and 10 above is striking

VIII

Towards Chitrakūṭa

Those who felt for him went with him — the man of truth; they did not return, even when compelled to go. They walked behind the coach; the man of virtue grew dear like the full-moon.

Rāma said to them, 'The love that you show to me, please show to Bharata now. He will be good and kind to all of you for, he is the prince; endowed with qualities, more than me, he will rule better than me.'

The more he spoke of *dharma*, the more the people wanted him as king. Some learned ones, advanced in age and with unsteady heads, cried aloud, 'O ye horses! get back, don't go.' Rāma noticed this, got down and walked ahead, with Sitā and Lakṣmana. Seeing him go further on, they got perplexed and said in anguish, 'We beg of you, come back; our heads, hairs all white, touch the dust of the Earth. If you but come, we can resume our ritual prayers. Look, the living and those that do not stir beg of you; show some pity. They cannot go with you; yet, the trees do cry, blown by the winds. The birds are perched on top of trees, not bent on searching for food; they beg of you; you are the man who has compassion for all.' Rāma saw the river Tamasā ahead; it too seemed to stop his course.

Beside the river, Rāma said to Sitā and Lakṣmana, 'This is the first night of our life in forest. Don't be sad, my dear. Look at the lonely jungle; it seems to weep. In Ayōdhyā, men and women must be now thinking of us. Bharata will know

how to take good care of father and mother, I know. You did well in coming with me; I would have had to find some means to guard Vaidēhi. Let us eat and spend the night here."

As night fell, the charioteer made the bed ready for Rāma — a bed of grass and leaves; Lakṣmaṇa assisted him. In the midst of Nature Rāma spent the night. As he heard the morning birds, Rāma said, 'Look at them, Lakṣmaṇa — these men who sleep beneath the trees, bothered about us and not their homes. While they are asleep, let us move by chariot.' 'Let us go soon', said Lakṣmaṇa. When the coach was ready, Rāma said, 'Go northwards and after a while, turn back'; he wished to put the people in confusion.

When they woke up, the city-dwellers got depressed. They tried to trace the course that Rāma took, but the wheel's imprint faded off. They cursed their fate and traced their steps back to Ayōdhyā.

When those that went with Rāma came back home, those at home began to cry. None could do the daily chore; there was weeping in every home. They praised the brother, Lakṣmaṇa and decried the mother of Bharata; women cried for Vaidēhi. 'Wrongly has Rāma been sent out', they all said. It was as if every woman had her own son or brother exiled.

Even before dawn, Rāma had gone a long way passing through farms and fields, and heard what villagers had to say of the king — 'firmly ruled by lust' —, and of 'cruel Kalkēyi, bent on cruel deed'. The man who was the chief of Kōsala thus crossed the limits of Kōsala, listening to all such words.

He crossed the river, Vēṇāśrutī, and went southwards till the river Gōmati; then he crossed the river Syandikā. Rāma told the charioteer, 'When will I ever come back and go hunting in the woods beside the river Sarayu?'

Then they reached Śrīngivērapura, beside the holy Gaṅgā, with sounds of swans and cranes. 'Let us stay here today', said Rāma.

* The sadness within comes out in incoherent thoughts.

Sumantra set the horses free of yoke; he went and stood beside Rāma, who sat beneath a tree. Meanwhile, having heard of Rāma's presence, Guha, the chief of Nisādas, arrived along with his kith and kin. He said, 'This is Ayōdhyā for you, Rāma. What can I do for you? Welcome to this country; it is all yours. Here is all the food and drink for you, and some things to comfort you.' Rāma held him in his arms and said, 'I must live a hermit's life, with clothes of bark, fruits and roots for food. I shall be content with some food for the horses; these are indeed favourite ones, for the king.'

Rāma drank some water, brought by Lakṣmaṇa himself; that was all the food. As he spread himself upon the floor, the brother washed his feet and stood beside him and Sita. Guha kept awake, talking to Sumantra and Lakṣmaṇa.

When Guha offered a bed for Lakṣmaṇa to sleep, saying it was his pleasant duty to keep guard of all of them, Lakṣmaṇa said, 'How can I sleep, when Daśaratha's son lies on the ground, and Sītā too? Here was a unique son; with him exiled, the king will live not long. He will soon be followed by the wives, Kausalyā and my mother. Lucky are those who will be by his side and do all the obsequies.' As he talked, the night was gone.

Rāma said at dawn, 'The Sun is due to rise; listen to the koel and the peacocks too. Let us cross the Gangā.' He then said to the charioteer, 'Now you should return; we shall go on foot.' 'If you will also let us down, we will fall into the clutch of Kaikeyī', said Sumantra. Rāma replied, 'You should act in such a way that the king may not think wrongly of me. Salute the king and tell him on my behalf that neither I nor Sītā, nor Lakṣmaṇa bother about this forest life; nor regret exile from Ayōdhyā. At the end of fourteen years, you will see us all.' Sumantra said, 'How can I go back without you? The city will perish when they see this coach without you.'

I know your love, but listen to what I say. When she sees you back in town, Kaikeyī will have some proof that Rāma is gone; then she will not suspect the king as a liar — that man of *dharma*.¹ So, for my sake, you must go — with this coach.'

Then he turned to Guha and said, 'I must change to matted hair. Bring me the milk of the Banyan tree.'

With matted hair and clothes of bark, the brothers looked like *rsis*. A boat was ready at the riverside. Rāma said to the brother, 'Get into the steady boat and help Sitā too, holding her by the hand, with care.' Rāma then entered the boat and hired the oarsmen. The boat slid into the river.

Valdēhi offered prayers to Gangā. 'If we come back and Rāma takes the crown, I will give away as gift cows and clothes to needy ones.' When they reached the shore, Rāma said to his brother, 'You walk ahead; let Sitā walk behind and I shall follow, taking care of both of you. Now she will begin to see how hard it is — this forest life.'

Then they killed some boars and deer; after dinner, they entered the forest. Rāma said, 'This is the first night that we are to spend outside the *janapada* and without Sumantra. Without minding it, we should be awake at night; Sitā's safety will be our duty now, Lakṣmana.' Spreading himself on the ground, Rāma began to talk of things. 'The king will find it hard to sleep today. Kaikeyī should be glad, having got what she wished. But, she might tease him more, once Bharata comes. The helpless old man, is deprived of me as well... what can he do, in the stranglehold of Kaikeyī — that lustful man? When I think of this sorry state and the perverse mind of the king, it seems to me that *kāma* is indeed stronger far than *artha* and *dharma*. Which fool would exile his son, to pander to a wanton woman, not to speak of a son like me who follows every word of his?' Lucky indeed is Bharata; he and his wife will rule over all of Kōsala, carefree, now that father is old and I am gone. He who gives up *artha* and *dharma*, to pursue *kāma* solely, must surely reach King Daśaratha's state. It looks as if Kaikeyī was wed to bring about the father's death, my exile and Bharata's kingship. Kaikeyī might cause further grief to mothers — yours and mine. Tomorrow you should go to Ayōdhyā; let me go to Daṇḍaka with Sitā. You will be of help to the helpless Kausaiyā. May no woman bring forth a son like me — one who brings endless grief to the

mother...Alone, I can deal with Ayōdhyā, or the whole world, with my arrows. Not that I cannot, but that I dread to do *adharma** (what is not right).'

Rāma spoke many such things; his face was flowing with tears. Consoling him Lakṣmaṇa said, 'You should not grieve like this; you make us sad — your wife and me. We cannot live without you even for a while, like fish taken out of water.'

In the morning, they left the place and went towards the spot where the Gaṅgā meets Yamunā. At close of day, Rāma said, 'Look Lakṣmaṇa, the smoke is rising; I think some hermits live here. This must be Prayāg; I hear the waters gurgling.' As the shadows lengthened, they reached the hermitage of Bhāradwāja.

Waiting to see the sage, they stood at a distance, with folded hands. Rāma announced himself. Seated amidst the birds and deer, the sage welcomed them and said, 'I have heard of your exile, without offence. This place where rivers meet is holy and pleasant. You are welcome to stay here.' Rāma replied, 'People will come to see us here; I wish to choose a lonely spot.' Bhāradwāja told him of Chitrakūṭa, a little away, beyond the river Ansumati.

Crossing the river on logs of float, made by Lakṣmaṇa, they reached Chitrakūṭa. Rāma surveyed the hill and chose a spot, beautiful with flowers and birds. 'Bring some wood and trees; make a cottage here. I like this place', said Rāma. When the cottage was ready, Rāma offered sacrifice before entering it. Made of leaves of trees, the cottage was pretty. With birds and beasts all around, fragrant blooms and unseen trees, beside the river Mālyavati, they were rid of the grief that exile caused.

Kamban abridges the story in this part and depicts Rāma as telling Sumantra to return to Ayōdhyā even on reaching the banks of the river Tamasā, so as to mislead the people

* The pent-up feelings come out, mingled with anxiety; this frankness enriches Rāma's humanity, despite the firm commitment to *dharma*.

who follow the chariot insistently. Declining to go back without Rāma, Sumantra says, 'If I should go and tell the king as if convincingly, the son he begot through penance is gone. It would seem that Kaiṣēyi was better far than me (in cruelty)' (II. 1863).

As Sumantra prepares to leave, Rāma sends the message that he would be back in Ayōdhyā after fourteen years. Sitā tells him to convey her respects to the mothers-in-law and adds, 'tell my sisters to take care of my pet birds.' Lakṣmana speaks in a tone of sarcasm, 'Tell the king who sent his son to live on food that jungle yields, while he does live in palace there — that man of truth! — we are still alive, far from quitting the world' (1882).

A couple of beautiful stanzas capture the awe-inspiring dignity of Rāma's entry into the forest. The noble one walked into the darkness there, with just this much as aid — the woman's avowed love, the brother, his own nature true, compassion-filled, with truth and his bow' (1886)

Again, as they reach the banks of the Gangā, Kamban instils a sense of wonder (*adbhuta rasa*), in a series of words ending in 'O' and uses them interrogatively to achieve effect. 'As the Sun withdrew into its own radiance, he walked along with his brother and wife of slender waist—the man of eternal charm. What blackness! was it the emerald gem, or the sea, or the rain-filled cloud that moved? What a handsome form!'^{3*}

The bondage that Guha is able to establish with Rāma is depicted tenderly. As they part, on crossing the Gangā, Rāma tells him, 'we were four, till now; with your boundless love, we are five from now.' Guha becomes worthy of fraternal love, in the family of Rāma.

* Euphonically, there is a crescendo in the line, '*maiṭyō, marakatamō, marī kadālō, mazhal muhilō*', which, like a wave upon the rock, breaks on the expletive, *aiṭyō*, in the last line, with wondrous effect.

Notes

1. *parituṣṭā hi sâ dēvi vanavāsam gatē mayi
rājanam nātisankēta mithyāvādi iti dhārmikam*
(V.II.46:52)
2. *Idam vyasanam ālōkya rāṇascha mativibhramam
kāma ēva arthadharmābhyām gariyan iti mē matih
kō hi avidwān api pumān pramadāyāh kritē tyajēt
cchandānuvartinam putram tatō mām Iva, Lakṣmaṇa!*
(V.II.47:9&10)
3. *vetyōn oli tan mēntiyin viri sōtliyin maṛalya
polyō enum idatyālodum ilatyānodum pōnān.
matyō marakatamō mari kadalō mazhai mukilō
alyō! Ivaṇ vaḍṭu enpatōr azhlyā azhakudaiyān*
(K.II.1926)

IX

The Lifeless City

Sumantra went back to Ayōdhyā, quite depressed. When he saw the city quiet and blank, it seemed as if all was burnt in the fire of grief.

'Where is Rāma?', asked a few who ran behind the coach. 'O Hell!', they said when they learnt he was gone. They stood in groups and said, 'unlucky we are; we won't see him.' Women stood beside the windows, their moans could be heard. Sumantra reached the palace and went to the king's chamber, crossing all the halls.

In the white hall, he saw the king and told him all that Rāma said. Hearing all in silence, the king fainted. Kausalyā lifted him and said, 'Why don't you talk to him who has come from the forest? Having brought calamity, are you afraid now? She, of whom you are afraid, is not here; you may talk freely' and she fell on the ground.

When he recovered, the king asked in piteous tone, 'What does Rāma live on? How does he sleep on the ground? How did my princely sons and Sītā walk on foot? Tell me, what did Rāma say when you left them there? and Laksmiana and Sītā too?' Sumantra said, 'Rāma told me, with folded hands, to convey his respects to all of you and to tell Bharata that, as prince, he should follow the king. As he spoke, Rāma shed tears. Laksmiana was in anger, asking what was Rāma's fault that he should be in forest now and said 'I do not see the father in him — the king.' Sītā was in grief, in sobs and sighs.

Not knowing what is grief, she spoke not a word to me; she cried, looked at me and the coach again and again.'

'For long I lingered', Sumantra went on, 'along with Guha, in the hope that Rāma might call me. The place was still; trees did not stir, nor even the beasts. As if in grief for Rāma, the forest was silent. As I came back here, none would look at me, nor speak. The city is sad, like Kausalyā bereft of son.'

Amidst tears the king said, 'Impelled by that sinful Kaikeyī, I failed to consult wise counsel, nor dear ones, nor ministers, nor prudent ones in Vēdic lore. I did this stupid thing in haste, beguiled into pleasing a woman.¹ If you think you owe something to me, bring Rāma back; my life is running out. Take this as my order; bring him back. Or, put me in your coach and take me where he is; let him see...What can be of greater grief than that, in this state, I cannot see my Rāma? O Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sitā! you do not know I die here of grief — a destitute.' He fainted

Now Kausalyā fell to the ground, trembled as if possessed by some spirit, and said, 'Take me where Rāma is; I cannot live without them. Turn the coach again towards Daṇḍaka.' With folded hands Sumantra said, 'Please give up this grief and confusion; panic leads but to grief again. Rāma lives in jungle, free of sorrow. Lakṣmaṇa is there to care for him and Sitā seems to feel at home, free of fear; she is lost in Rāma. Not in the least does she seem helpless; she is like a playful girl. They are happy there, living up to father's word.'

Kausalyā was not consoled; she kept wailing, 'Ah my son, Rāma dear.' Then she turned to the husband and said, 'Although your fame has spread far and wide, as kind and liberal, how could you, great man! let them suffer — your sons and Sitā? When will I see the lovely face of Rāma? My heart, indeed, is made of rock for, it does not break into thousand bits when bereft of him. Even if he did come, after fourteen years, to take the kingdom left by Bharata fully enjoyed, how can the elder one but scorn to take what the younger one has enjoyed? The tiger refuses to eat the food that anyone else has brought; the same is true of the Tiger

among men.* I have no go. You have ruined this country, ruined the people, ruined me and my son. Your wife and your son are happy now.'

As he heard such rude words from Rāma's mother, the king sadly reflected. His mind recalled the evil he had done long ago, unknowingly. He said to her, 'I beg of you with folded hands you should not say such harsh words, aggrieved as you are, to a man already in grief intense. To a woman, the husband is a virtuous man even if devoid of virtues.' She said, with folded hands raised to the head, 'Bear with me, my Lord! I know what is *dharma* and I know you as man of truth and *dharma*. My grief over my son led me to say all sorts of things. these five nights that he has been away are like five years to me. Thinking all the time of him, my grief swells like the sea fed by rivers.'

The Sun grew slanting, as night fell, the king fell asleep. Waking up before long, he fell into deep thought. In the middle of the night, he remembered the evil he had done. He said to Kausalyā, "Good or bad, we do receive but what we give: man is the maker of his own destiny. Like a child who, in ignorance, has taken poison, the way I used my skill in archery — to hit the kill by sensing sound — has brought this grief on me. I was prince, this happened then, before I married you. Once, when the monsoon came I went out to hunt beside the river, Sarayu. The heat was less, the clouds were dense: peacocks and deer roamed happily. To hunt at night, and kill a wild bull, elephant or, anything else, was my aim. In the darkness I heard a sound like a pot being filled: it also seemed like the gurgling of an elephant. I took out an arrow and sent it like a deadly snake. I heard a human voice, in wailful moan and the sound of someone falling in water. 'Who has shot this arrow? What have I done to him?' he said, 'I do not care for my own self; I worry for my parents old. How can they live when I am dead?' My bow and arrow fell to the

* There is a pun on the word *sārdūla* (tiger): it also applied to heroic man.

ground, as I heard the pathetic wail. I saw a hermit boy, hit by my arrow on Sarayū bank.

“I live in the forest here; what harm did I do to you? With a single arrow you have killed me, but two blind old beings wait for me to fetch them water to drink. O king! go and tell my father quickly what you did; this foot-path leads to my cottage. He will not curse you in anger, I hope. Console him...and take this arrow out.’

“How could I atone for that thoughtless deed? I was in agony. I took the pot, filled with water, and reached the cottage by the path he showed. There I saw the aged parents, like birds bereft of wings. As he heard my foot-steps, the sage said, ‘Why are you delayed? Give me some water. Your mother was worried that you spent so long sporting in the river; you know you are our eyes, sightless as we are...why don’t you talk to us?’ Faint in voice, with fear in my heart, I said the terrible words, ‘No, I am not your son; I am Daśaratha, a warrior. By my deed I have caused infinite grief. With bow in hand, when I was on the banks of Sarayu, looking for hunt, I heard a sound — like a pot being filled in water. Taking it to be an elephant, I shot the arrow. When I went to see, I saw a hermit boy on the ground. Sir, in ignorance I have killed your son; he is no more. I beg your pardon.’

“As I stood with folded hands, the sage said, ‘If you had not come to tell me this yourself, your head would now have been blown to bits. Since you did this in ignorance, not wantonly, you are still alive. Lead us to where he fell.’ I took them there and made them feel the body. The father mourned and cried; he said to me, ‘Kill me today; use that arrow with which you killed my only son and made me sonless. For your thoughtless deed, I curse you now. The grief you witness now — loss of son —, shall fall to you in course of time.’ Those words have come true. Kausalyā! I cannot see where you are; memory fails. Lucky are those who will see my son again, after fifteen years. This grief which I caused to myself is making me sink.” ‘O Rāma, great man!’ he cried and fell dead.

Kamban’s narrative does not dwell on the scene in

Kausalyā's chamber, nor refer to the recollection of the curse that was incurred by Daśaratha for killing the hermit boy. The reader is left with the impression that Daśaratha was alone when he died. On learning that Sumantra was back, the king asks of Rāma. Sumantra is sullen, unable to say 'no'. But his face proclaims 'he hasn't come'; the king's spirit is lost. Sage Vasistha leaves, unable to bear the sight. When again the king asks, 'Is he nearby or, gone too far?', Sumantra says, 'deep into the forest he is gone, with brother and wife.' At once, Daśaratha dies.

When the wives gather to mourn, Kausalyā taunts Kaikēyī, 'look, this is the boon you got'. On hearing the news from Sumantra Vasistha reflects on Fate. But, his state of mind is described by Kambar as resembling that of a witless sailor whose Captain is no more, and the ship is lost in mid-sea wreck.^{2*}

The Unwanted Kingdom

Next morning, women and bards gathered at the door of the king, as usual, with pots of holy water, to wake him up with hymns of praise. The women who were close to him went to wake him up; they trembled like blades of grass in water's waves when they doubted life. They raised a pathetic wail.

Daśaratha lay like fire extinguished, like the sea drained of water, like the Sun bereft of shine. Kausalyā lifted the head and said to Kaikēyī, 'Be happy now; enjoy this kingdom free of thorns, having despatched the king, you evil woman!³ I cannot bear to live; Rāma is gone and the king is dead. On account of that crooked woman, Kaikēyī has destroyed the race of Raghu.' People led her away.

They then placed the king's body in a tub of oil, to preserve it there; there was no son to perform the funeral rites. The palace was in gloom, like the night without a star. Men and

* A simile that is reminiscent of seafaring Tamil expeditions (Vālmiki makes no such reference)

women sat in little groups blaming it on Bharata's mother.

Officials gathered next morning and with the ṛsis — Mārkaṇḍēya, Vāmadēva and others — went up to Vasistha and said, 'Now that the king is dead, Rāma is in the forest along with Lakṣmaṇa, and Bharata and Śatrughna are away in Kēkaya, someone must be named king today. Our country will suffer without a king. A country without a king is like a river without water, a grassless desert, a herd of cows without the cowherd. None is safe in such a country and people swallow each other, like fish. So, advise us; you have always been our counsel. Place upon the throne anyone else of Ikshvāku race.'

'Let Bharata be brought here soon', said the sage, adding 'But, don't tell him of Rāma's exile or of the king's death. Take some silken clothes with you for Bharata* and the king of Kēkaya.'

The messengers rode fast: crossing the Gangā at Hastinapur they reached Panchāla country. By nightfall they were in Gīrivraja.*

That very night, Bharata had a bad dream; he felt agitated. His friends tried to divert his mind with music, dance and humour too. Bharata said, 'I will tell you why I am sad. I saw my father in a dream: from the height of a hill, he fell headlong into a mess of cow-dung; I saw him swim in it and he drank some oil again and again, laughing all the time. I saw some smoky hills and he was seated on a black seat. Black and red-looking women laughed at him as he rode towards the South, in a cart drawn by asses. I fear this means death, to me or the king or to Rāma.'

As he spoke, the messengers who had entered the city of Rājagriha* stood before the king and Bharata, with gifts. Receiving them with due honours, Bharata asked, 'Is every-

* There must have been a town of that name in Panchāla country; if the name, which is a synonym for Rājagriha, is taken as referring to Rājgir, in Magadha, the topography of the route becomes confusing.

one well — the king and the queens?' 'All are well', they said, 'you are needed urgently.' Bharata took leave of his grandfather, saying 'I will be back when you want me.' The king sent him with gifts and messages of greetings for all in Ayōdhyā.

At the end of the seven-day journey, as he entered the city of Ayōdhyā, Bharata said to the charioteer, 'Ayōdhyā looks so dull. It seems to me like a forest and I see evil signs. Men and women appear sad.' Head downcast, he entered the father's chamber.

Not finding the father there, he went to see his mother. She rose from the golden chair and he touched her feet. She kissed him on the forehead, embraced him and said, 'You must be tired, after that long journey. Is your uncle, Yudhājit, well?'

Thus lovingly asked, he replied, 'I am not tired any more. All are well in Kēkaya; they have sent plenty of gifts and gold. Now, tell me why is this place so void? The king is always here, happy in my mother's chamber. Where is he? I must touch his feet.' She gave the terrible news, as if it were happy news, overwhelmed by greed for pelf. 'Where all living beings go, there your father too has gone', she added.

The innocent man of noble birth fell to the ground in grief. She lifted him and said, 'Arise: how can you lie on the ground — son of a king? Persons like you should not grieve publicly.' After a while, he wiped his tears and said, 'I came in the belief that the king was to make Rāma crown-prince or, was to begin a great Yajña. Things have turned out thus. Mother! of what did my father die, even before I could reach? Rāma and others were, at least, fortunate to perform his last rites. I miss the hand that would touch me fondly and shake the dust off my clothes. Where is Rāma, veritably my father, brother, friend all in one? What did father say, as his last message to me?'

She said, "The king's parting words were 'Ah Rāma! Ah Sitā! Ah Lakṣmanal' and he went on his journey to heaven." Bharata grew pale as he heard the second shocking news. 'And now, where is Kausalyā's son so dear? Where did he go,

with Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa?' Under the delusion that it was likeable news, she said, 'In clothes of bark that princely man has gone into Daṇḍaka forest, along with Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa.'

Doubting what could have been Rāma's offence, to cause such sentence, he asked, 'Did Rāma rob a pious man of his wealth, or did he torture some poor innocent man? Surely, he wouldn't have looked at another's wife. Then, why? Why did he have to go to Daṇḍaka?'

The foolish woman that she was, Kalkēyī began to tell of her deed, as it happened. 'No, Rāma did not do any of the things that you said. It was I who asked for Rāma's exile and the crown for you. Your father remembered his promise and did accordingly. When Rāma was sent away, with Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa, the king succumbed to grief caused by separation from his dear son. I did all this for you. Take the kingship now.'

Burning with grief, Bharata said, 'What a thing to do, to get the crown for wretched me — depriving me of father and the brother who is father-like! Having turned the king into a corpse and Rāma into a sage, you have doubled my woe, pouring acid upon a wound. You are indeed the destroyer of the race, like some evil spirit. Rāma was always good to you, as much as to his mother, and Kausalyā treated you like sister. How could you have thought of turning her son into a hermit, in clothes of bark, O Sinner? Your greed has brought ruin of this size. Without Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa what would be my moral force to rule this land? No, I will not do what you want. I will bring my brother back from the jungle.' In anguish he roared like a lion in its cave.

Roused to great indignation, Bharata said again, 'Get out of this kingdom, you sinful woman! You can weep over my dead body, since *dharma* has abandoned you.⁴ You brought about death and exile to the two of them! Go to Hell, for having done this kind of sin. You are a deadly foe in mother's *garb*; for, you have brought on me eternal shame. I shouldn't *talk* to you. You are not the daughter of Aśvapati; you are a *rākṣasi* come to destroy my father's race. I will bring that son

of Kausalyā back here and take his place, to live amidst sages in the forest.'

Kausalyā heard the noise and set out to meet the son of Kaikēyī. Bharata too went towards her chamber. He and Śatrughna saw the sorrow-laden Kausalyā and held her by the arm. She said to Bharata, 'Here, this kingdom is yours now; you longed for it. Kaikēyī managed it fast, with a cruel deed. What good did she find, packing off my son with clothes of bark? She should send me too to where my son lives. Or, I will go myself; or, you should lead me there, where my noble son sits in severe penance.'

With folded hands Bharata told the wailing woman, 'Noble one! how can you blame me, innocent and faultless as I am? You know my deep, unswerving love for Rāma. He, at whose instance Rāma had to go, could never be of disciplined mind. May he incur the sin that befalls a man who is traitor to the king who rules, or the sin of a king who collects his share of tax (one-sixth) but does not guard his subjects, or the sin of one who kills a king, woman, child, or old man, ...' and as he cited many another sin. Kausalyā said to him, 'My grief grows again; your oath hurts me now. Fortunate indeed that your spirit has not swerved from *dharma*.' The night was spent in grief.

Vasistha said to the grieving Bharata, 'Enough of this, young prince! the time has come to perform the rites for the king.' The body was then taken out of the oil and placed on the ground. Looking at the yellow face of the king — he seemed to sleep — the son cried, 'What have you done, O king! when Rāma was gone and I had not yet reached here? Where have you gone, leaving all the sorrowing people? The Earth looks widowed, without you.' Vasistha said to him again, 'The funeral rites must now be done, free of agitation.'

Bharata agreed and ordered men to speed up the arrangements. They placed the body on the bier and the path was showered with silver and gold. Deodar, Sandal and choicest woods were brought to make the funeral pyre; the body was placed on it, sprinkled with perfumes and scent. The pyre

was lit and chants were raised. Women wailed; it was like many *krauñcha* birds moaning in grief.

On the thirteenth day, when he went for the bath of purification, Bharata looked at the cremation spot and cried again, recalling all the qualities of his father. 'Bereft of father and my brother, I do not wish to enter Ayōdhyā; to forest I will go.' Vasistha then said to him, 'All are subject to extremes in life, of three kinds;* in regard to those that are inevitable, you cannot behave thus.' The brothers wiped their tears and went through the rites.

Then Śatrughna said to Bharata, who was determined to go. 'Rāma, the man of truth, has been exiled at a woman's instance; but, why didn't Lakṣmana set him free of the bond, even if it be by overpowering father? Indeed, father should have been suppressed for, he was a tool in the hands of a woman.' As Śatrughna was talking, there appeared on the eastern gate the crooked woman, fully decked in silk and gold. The door-man announced her presence and Śatrughna's fury rose at once. 'Let her reap the fruit of what she did to my father and brothers' and as he held her, Mantharā cried aloud. Maid-servants ran to Kausalyā for help, while Śatrughna dragged Mantharā along the floor and spoke angry words of Kaikēyī. Kaikēyī was deeply hurt; she sought the help of Bharata. He said to the angry brother, 'Women should never be killed; they must be excused. Or, I could have killed this sinful Kaikēyī herself, but then Rāma would for ever hold me in contempt, as a murderer of his own mother.⁵ Even if the crooked woman were to be killed, if Rāma heard of it, he would stop talking to us.' Mantharā was released.

On the morning of the fourteenth day, officials went up to Bharata and said, 'The king is gone to heaven; Rāma is exiled and Lakṣmana as well. Be our king, today. Persons of all ranks are waiting now, with all the things for the coronation.' Bharata walked in circle round the holy pot and told the persons there, 'You ought not to say such things to me. It is

* Pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, life and death.

the eldest who should rule; that has been the custom in my race. I shall go and live in forest, for nine years and five, but after I bring him here. Let all these things go with me: the coronation will be held there itself. My mother's wish shall not be met. Rāma shall be king.'

'May fortune be with you, since you speak such words and wish to confer kingship on your eldest brother', they said with tears of joy in their eyes.

Men began to work, making a road to the forest, each well-versed in his craft — road-makers, diggers, those who knew how to handle machines of many kinds. The happy groups of men seemed like swelling ocean on full-moon day. The route of the army was quickly made, with wayside rest-house for Bharata.

The night before the day planned for Bharata to be placed on the throne, singers of praise began to sing in clever phrase the lucky days ahead, with conches blowing and drums resounding. The noise caused further grief to the man in grief; Bharata turned it off, saying, 'I am not the king.' He then told Satrughna, 'Look, this insulting show is Kaikeyi's deed...when the king is dead, leaving all the problems to me and when the kingdom is shaky, like an oarless boat in water.'

Vasiṣṭha entered the assembly hall, filled with men. He took his seat, upon a golden chair, and asked for Bharata to be brought. There was flutter in the hall as Bharata entered; some felt they saw Daśaratha again. Then the chief among sages said in soft tone, 'My son Daśaratha has gone to heaven, adhering to *dharma*; he left this rich country for you to rule. Rāma, the man of truth, did not transgress the father's wish. That which your father and brother gave to you, please take; anoint yourself without delay.'

As he heard these words, Bharata reflected on Rāma; he knew of *dharma*, and wished to pursue it. His voice was choked, as he uttered, in broken tones, words of condemnation addressed to the sage: 'How can anyone born of Daśaratha become usurper? This kingdom and I belong to Rāma. This is the *dharma* you ought to teach.'⁶ The eldest and the

noblest should get the kingdom, like Dileepa and Nahusha. If I should commit this vulgar sin, I shall bring ill-fame to the race of Ikshvāku. If my mother did some wrong, I have condemned it. Here, I go to the forest, in Rāma's foot-steps. He shall be the king, of all three worlds.' As people heard him, with tears in their eyes, he added, 'If I cannot bring him back, I too will live there like the noble Lakṣmana.' Then, Bharata told Sumantra, 'Take my orders: get things ready for the journey.'

When people heard of the journey to bring Rāma back, there was joy everywhere, women hustled their husbands, in every home.

Kamban's treatment of the events following the death of Daśaratha is different, in certain details. Firstly, messengers from Ayōdhyā are shown as carrying a message on palm-leaf (content not disclosed but, evidently avoiding the news of the king's death) and before handing it over, they confirm, as in Vālmiki, that all is well in Ayōdhyā. Secondly, there is no reference to any dream or foreboding of the coming events, and thirdly, the journey to and from Panchāla deśa is not described.

The conversation between Bharata and Kaikeyī, however, follows Vālmiki closely. But, whereas Vālmiki lends dramatic suspense to the dialogue when Kaikeyī says, "The king's parting words were 'Ah Rāma! Ah Sītā! Ah Lakṣmaṇa!'", Kamban achieves another effect when Bharata asks pointedly, 'Did Rāma go away to the forest before father died or, after?' This lends punch to the next question, 'Why did the son get exiled when father was alive?' Awkwardness is brimming in the next stanza when she admits, 'The word he gave to grant the boons, I took; I sent his son to the forest and made this land all yours. He could not bear it; he died — the emperor.'⁷

Bharata's indignant protest finds expression in angry

* A development of the idea 'tvaṅkritē hi mayā sarvaṁ evaṁ vidham kritam'.

words, as in Vālmiki. Viewing things in juxtaposition, the proposition that he should take the crown appears in all its absurdity when he says, 'To die for a word you have a king; a heroic man you have who can take to forest life; if you have a Bharata to take the crown, faultless indeed is *dharma*.'*

Again, talking to Vasistha, Bharata shows his indignation, juxtaposing the attitudes that prevail. 'If I should take the crown, taking what the elders say as *dharma*, then what is wrong in what my mother did?' Distortion of every kind is reprehensible.

When Bharata meets Kausalyā, he says, 'I have not been lucky enough to touch the feet of my brother. You should have tried to stop him. Whoever wrought this evil will perish, though I shouldn't say this.' Then Kausalyā hesitantly says, 'You do not seem to know what the offspring of Kēkaya did.' Whereupon, Bharata swears and reels off the sins that he would invoke upon himself, if he were at all responsible (as in Vālmiki). Kausalyā is moved; she tells him, 'In all your clan, who can equal you?'

At the cremation of Daśaratha's body, Kamban introduces two variations: first, it is Śatrughna who performs the obseques, consequent upon Vasistha's reminder that Daśaratha had forbidden Bharata to perform the rites. Secondly, all the wives of the dead king, except the three queens, are described as committing *sati* and going to heaven.*

Then, Vasistha tells Bharata to take the crown, as in Vālmiki (the words are identical; the stanza '*undaiyō irandan...*' is an exact translation of '*rājā daśarathō gataḥ swargam...*'). Bharata's answer, born of righteous indignation, is befitting of nobility. He says, 'If what you elders say is *dharma*, then what was wrong in what my mother did?' and concludes, 'Even if it were *dharma*, I refuse to take the

* There is no parallel for this in medieval Tamil literature. In any case, it is odd that the honour should be denied to the chief consorts! (this stanza 2238 is clearly an interpolation).

burden of kingship. What I will do is to bring him back and establish the *dharma* that belongs to our tradition.'

Both Vālmiki and Kamban emphasise the grandeur of Bharata, who embodies the nobler value of renunciation (*aparigraha*), as much as Rāma, if not more.

Notes

1. *Kaikētyyā vintiyuktēna pāpābhījanabhāvayā
mayā na mantrakuśalaih vridhdhaiḥ saha samarthitam
na suhriddbhīr na chāmātyair mantrayitvā na nalgamath
mayā ayam arthah sammōhāt streehētōḥ sahasā kritah*
(V.II.53:15&16)
2. *vanda munivan, varam koduttu makanai neetta vankanmai
endai teerndān ena uḷḷattu eṇṇi eṇṇi tranguvān,
undu kaḍalil perunkalam onṇu udaiyā nīrkq-t tant nāṭkan
naiṇdu neengā-c ceyal orā meekāmanai-p pōl nalluvuṭṭān.*
(K.II.1913)
3. *sakāmā bhava kaikēyī! bhungkṣva rājyam akantakam
tyaktvā rājānain ekāgrā nṛtsamsē! duṣṭachārīnī!*
(V.II.60:3)
4. *rājyāt bhramśasva Kaikēyī! nṛtsamsē duṣṭachārīnī
parityaktā cha dhurmēna mā mṛitam rudate bhava*
(V.II.68:2)
5. *hanyām aham imām pāpām Kaikētyim duṣṭachārīnīm
yadi mām dhārmiko Rāmō nāsooyet mātṛ-ghātakam*
(V.II.72:21)
6. *katham Daśarathāt Jātō bhavēt rājyāpahārahah
rājyam cha aham cha Rāmasya, dharmam vaktum arhasi*
(V.II.76:11)
7. *vākkīnāl varam tarak-konḍu maṇḍanaḥ-p
pōkkīnēn vanattīḍal; pōkki pār unakku
ākkīnēn. avan adu porukkāmalyāl
neekkīnān tan uyīr, nemī vendu' enṛā!*
(K.II.2166)
8. *mālavum uḷan oru mannan van colāl;
mēlavum uḷan oru veeran; mēya pār
ālavum uḷan oru Bharatan; āyīnāl
kōl ila aṇaneri! kuṛai undākumō?*
(K.II.2174)

X

Who Will Take the Throne?

In the morning, as soon as he got up, Bharata set out with eagerness to meet Rāma. Many carriages followed him, while officials went ahead of him. Kausalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī too went with him, to see Rāma and Lakṣmana, of whom they talked all along the way.

As they reached the banks of the Gangā, Bharata ordered the troupe to rest; he himself sat and reflected on how Rāma could be brought back.

From a distance, Guha saw the oncoming army of men, with flags atop the chariots they rode. He called out to his fold and said, 'Here comes Bharata to exterminate Rāma who stands exiled. Rāma is my friend and master. For his sake, all of you should go and guard the riverside. If Bharata comes as a friend, he and his men may cross the Gangā in safety.'

He then took some meat and wine and walked towards Bharata. On seeing him, the charioteer said, 'Here comes the chief of Nisādas, Guha by name; he is a friend of your brother's. He will know, no doubt, where Rāma lives now. 'Let him meet me', said Bharata.

Guha told Bharata, 'This is a pleasant place; you should have sent me intimation. What we have — fruits and roots, meats and wine — we shall place at your disposal. Your army can rest and leave tomorrow.' Bharata said, 'Now it is clear how much you love my elder brother. Tell me, how do I reach the hermitage of Bhāradwāja?' Guha replied, 'My men will

go with you; I will go myself. Seeing the huge army with you, I wonder if you have some evil in mind as you go towards Rāma.' Bharata said, 'May that day never come when what you suspect of me will turn out to be true. Rāma is my elder brother; he is like a father to me. It is to bring him back that I go. This is truth; don't think otherwise.'

With joy on his face, Guha said cheerfully, 'You are truly blessed; I haven't seen the like of you — eager to give up the kingdom that fell on the lap. Your fame will spread in all the world that you wish to retrieve Rāma from out of sorrow.' As they walked, the Sun went down and darkness grew. Bharata lay down to rest, but all his thoughts were of Rāma who did not deserve what befell on him. Burning within, he perspired like a snowy hill under the heat of the Sun. Guha tried to assure him of his brother's welfare, and told him of Lakṣmana's devotion — how he kept awake all night guarding Rāma and Sitā as they slept, even though Guha and his men offered to take over that duty. He added, 'Next morning, Rāma and Lakṣmana turned the hair into matted lock and went beyond the Gaṅgā.'

Bharata was in greater grief. 'Where did Rāma rest at night?' he asked. Guha showed the place, saying 'Here, beneath this tree, upon the grass. He declined the food and drink that I offered; he took some water, brought by Lakṣmana, and went to sleep. Lakṣmana washed the feet of Rāma and Sitā, before they retired.'

Bharata called out to the mothers and said, 'That noble man, born of Daśaratha, did he deserve to sleep on the ground — the prince who was used to sleep on silken bed? Sure, Fate is strong, that Daśaratha's son and the daughter of Vidēha should sleep on such rugged ground. From today, I too shall wear clothes of bark and matted hair, I too shall sleep on the ground. I shall live in the forest, with Śatrughna; Rāma shall return to Ayōdhyā. Let the sages place him on the throne. May the gods make my wish come true!'

Next morning, he told Śatrughna to fetch Guha and get the boat ready to cross the Gaṅgā. Many boats were brought and

they all crossed the river; some swam across, others waded with the help of pots. The hermitage of Bhāradwāja was in sight.

Leaving the rest behind, Bharata went walking to the place with only Vasiṣṭha to lead. On seeing the sage, Bhāradwāja got up from his seat and welcomed him with water and fruit. When Vasiṣṭha and Bharata made obeisance to the sage, he understood the young man to be Daśaratha's son. He made enquiries about Ayōdhyā, but did not refer to Daśaratha, having heard of his demise. Then he asked Bharata, 'Why are you here, while you should be ruling the kingdom? Tell me everything; my mind is not clear. That son of Kausalyā was exiled; with wife and brother he is here. Let him be a forest-dweller for fourteen years. Have you come to harm the innocent man?'

'Ah, I am undone!' said Bharata in tears, 'if you too should think of me this way. I am faultless, Sir; I do not approve of what my mother said, for my sake. I am neither happy with it, nor acted upon it. I am here to take him back — the noble one — and remain at his feet. In the light of this, you should pardon me and bless me. Tell me Sir, where is Rāma?'

Bhāradwāja was pleased. He said, 'It befits you to say this, as a man of Raghu race. I know that, deep at heart, you are firm in your resolve. I asked you that in order to make your fame better-known. Your brother is here, in Chitrakūṭa. You may go tomorrow. For my sake, stay here today along with your men.'

The sage ordered full hospitality. 'Bring your men', he said, 'I shall invoke Viśvakarmā to look after the arrangements. Let there be wine (*Maireya*) and the juice of sugar-cane as well; let the Gandharvas, Dēvas and celestial damsels arrive; food of every kind shall be here.' As the sage sprinkled holy water, many things arrived, one by one; plants and flowers began to appear. Music filled the air and the pretty women sent by Prajāpati and Kubēra were stunning; whichever man they held by the hand seemed intoxicated. 'Let them eat and drink as much as they like', said the sage:

and there were seven or eight women to attend on each man! So pleased were the men that many said, 'Let us not go, either to Ayōdhyā or to the Daṇḍaka forest. We shall stay here and may Rāma be well, may Bharata be well.'

Next morning, the sage enquired of Bharata if he and his men had a comfortable stay. Bharata offered salutation and said, 'In every way, every one of us. Now, please tell me how to reach Rāma's abode.' Bhāradwāja told him the way to Chitrakūṭa and, as the entourage was taking leave, he asked about the mothers. Bharata replied, 'She who is emaciated in grief is the one who gave birth to Rāma. To her left is Sumitrā whose sons are Lakṣmana and Śatrughna. She whose ruination has brought the noble brothers to the forest and despatched the king, bereft of son, to heaven that ignoble woman in noble garb is my mother.' Bhāradwāja said to him, 'You should not blame Kaikeyī. Good things will flow out of Rāma's exile.' Bharata made obeisance to the sage and told his men to get ready. As the army went southwards through the forest, startling birds and deer as they walked, it lent a glow to the huge forest.

The vast army spread upon the earth like the dark cloud during monsoon. After some distance, Bharata told Vaṣiṣṭha, 'I think we have reached the region that Bhāradwāja spoke of; this jungle is dense like a cloud. I can see the Gaṅgā river and this must be Chitrakūṭa; it seems to be a very attractive place. Let our men look out and search for the place where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa can be found.' Soon, some saw a rising smoke and inferred that it was the place. Bharata told them to stay behind; he moved forward, with Sumantra and Vaṣiṣṭha. His eyes were fixt in the direction of the smoke.

At that time, Rāma was showing the Chitrakūṭa hills to Sitā in order to amuse her and to indulge his own mind; they looked like Indra and Śachi. He said, 'The exile does not bother me, my dear; nor this isolation from near ones, when I see this lovely hill. Look at the many birds here; some of the cliffs seem to touch the sky, radiant in their many colours — silver, purple and yellow. Look at the women on the hills,

amidst flowers of many kinds and beneath the shades of many trees. Who will not be delighted by the fragrance here? No grief can touch me, even if I live here for many years, with you beside me and Lakṣmana. This exile has been fruitful to me in two ways: proving my father truthful, in working things to Bharata's benefit and, secondly, having you to sport with me in this lovely hill. This is what the ancients called bliss, for the king to become a *rājarsī*!

Rāma then went down the hill, to the riverside. Watching the beautiful Mandākinī, Rāma told the pretty daughter of the king of Vidēha, 'Look at this river, embellished with flowers of many kinds and trees with fruits that grow along the coast. With flocks of deer that drink off the shallow waters here, the flowing streams make me feel romantic. Look at the holy men who bathe in the river and, with uplifted arms, pray to the Sun. The hill indeed seems to dance, with trees on cliffs wafting in the breeze and shedding flowers beside the stream, bluish-green upon the sands. Strewn by the winds, the flowers seem to swim in mid-stream and see how the *chakravāka* birds call out to one another for mating. The sight of this Chitrakūta and Mandākinī is delightful to me, more so because I see them with you. Come, let us bathe in the river; swim with me like a friend, making the lotuses rise and fall beside. Consider the beasts here as citizens of Ayōdhyā, the hillside as the city and this river as Sarayū. With you beside me, so loving and supporting, I do not care for Ayōdhyā, nor for the crown when I am with you.' And, Lakṣmana is here to stand by me. Who will not be happy here, rid of all care?'

Resting beside a hilly spot, Rāma cooked some meat and served it to Sītā. Meanwhile, there was a distant sound that rent the sky and the dust of marching men rose in the air, disturbing the animals. Seeing them run in fright, Rāma called Lakṣmana and told him to find out if any king was out on a hunting trip, or some wild animal.

Lakṣmana climbed upon a tree; eastward, he sighted an army of men, horses and elephants, with flag-bearing

chariots. He told Rāma, 'An army is here. Put out the fire; let Sitā go into a cave. Take up arms and put on your armour.' 'Whose army do you think it is?' asked Rāma. Raging with fury, Lakṣmaṇa replied, 'Not content with the kingdom, here comes Bharata to kill us. Let us go and wait on top of the hill; or, let us stay here. Maybe, I can see him, on whose account you and I and Sitā too are here in grief. He is a foe and deserves death; I see nothing wrong in it, Rāma. Let Kaikeyī — that greedy woman — see today her son fall, like a tree felled by an elephant. I shall kill her too; let this world be rid of evil. I shall destroy the entire army, tear the bodies apart and flood the place with blood.'

Rāma tried to calm the brother in fury. He said, "What is the need for bow and arrow when noble Bharata is here in person? He is not the one to dream of any harm to any of us. Has he ever done anything you dislike, that you should have such doubts and fears today? You should not say anything harsh to him; it will be like being harsh to me. How can a son kill the father, or a brother kill another? If it is for the sake of the kingdom that you say such things, I will tell him to give it to you. The moment I say that, he is the one who will say, 'indeed'."

Lakṣmaṇa's limbs shrank in shame. Seeing him feel thus, Rāma said, 'I think he comes to see us and to take us back home; or, at least this one, Sitā who is used to comfort.' Lakṣmaṇa stood by the side of Rāma, with folded hands.

Bharata ordered the army to stay behind and went on foot towards Rāma. As he walked, he told Śatrughna, 'You must quickly search this place, along with groups of men. Until I see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and Sitā, I cannot rest; until I place my head at his feet, until I have him sprinkled with holy water and make him take the throne, I cannot be at rest. Lucky is this Chitrakūṭa for Rāma to be living here.' Walking through the wooded greens and flowery boughs, he sighted a cottage with a flag on top. He thought that was the place; towards the cottage he hurried, followed by Guha. While he waited for Śatrughna, he asked Vasiṣṭha to bring the mothers.

Sumantra and Śatrughna were behind, at a distance. Bharata saw a leafy cottage, with chopped wood and faded flowers strewn around; cakes of cow-dung were stacked outside. 'This is the place that was told to us by Bhāradwāja, I think — not far from the river, Mandākinī', he said, 'and here I am to meet the noblest of men who suffers on my account. I must fall at his feet, again and again, and Sītā's too.' He kept mumbling things like that and there! he saw the holy cottage.

For a while, he kept looking at him — the elder brother with matted hair, in clothes of bark with a deer-skin round the waist. He was seated upon a mat of grass, radiant like Brahmā; Sītā and Lakṣmana were with him. Bharata began to run towards him, moaning words amidst tears. He went and fell at Rāma's feet — fell before he could reach for them. 'Noble one!' he said and cried; he spoke no more. All around were in tears.

Rāma lifted him, kissed him on the forehead and embraced him. Then he seated the brother upon his lap and asked, 'What happened to your father that you should be in forest now? Why have you come to this formidable jungle, my boy? I hope the king is well.' Then Rāma asked many questions about personal and public life in Ayōdhyā — questions by means of which he sought to underline the laws of *dharma* in administration.*

Bharata replied, 'What can all this kingly *dharma* do to me bereft as I am of all *dharma*? It has been a rule of *dharma* among us that the eldest son takes the crown, not the younger one. That being so, come with me to Ayōdhyā and take the crown, for to redeem the race. When I was away in Kēkaya and after you came away to the forest, the king passed away. Come, noble one! perform the obsequies to father; Śatrughna and I have done it already.'

Rāma was lost in thought: he stood with uplifted hands

* This section, often known as *kacchit sarga*, may be useful as information on kingship of those days; but, it interrupts the flow of the story. As such, it seems to be an interpolation.

and fell to the ground, like a tree under the axe. The brothers and Sitā sprinkled water on him. Talking feebly he said, 'What use am I as a son to him who died of grief at my parting? I could not even perform his last rites. Bharata was fortunate.' Then he turned to his wife and said, 'Sitā! your father-in-law is no more. Lakṣmana! you are fatherless. Let us go to the riverside and perform the rites; bring some *Ingudi*. Let Sitā lead, you go with her and I shall follow.'

Sumantra kept consoling Rāma, as he descended towards the river. They reached the rapid-flowing river and sprinkled water for the dead. Then Rāma took some water in his palms and faced the South; with tears, he said, 'May this water serve as worship to you in the other world, O King!' and offered the cakes of *Ingudi* and fruits, kept on the shore.

Then they climbed up to the cottage. At the door, Rāma held Bharata and Lakṣmana by the hand; they all broke down and cried. Bharata's men were drawn to the cottage by the noise. Vasistha also reached there, along with the wives of Daśaratha, who passed by the river and moaned at the sight of the *Ingudi* offering Rāma had made for the father.

The mothers then saw Rāma in the cottage, bereft of all pleasures, yet radiant like a celestial being from heaven: they cried. Rāma stood up and touched their feet, they gently brushed the dust from off his back with their soft fingers, while he bent. Lakṣmana and Sitā followed. Kausalyā embraced Sitā and said, 'The daughter of Vidēha king, daughter-in-law of Daśaratha, and wife of Rāma, see how you suffer in this lonely forest. When I see your face, like the lotus in the scorching Sun, like a crumpled lily, like the Moon beneath the dark cloud, the fire of grief burns within me.' While she was talking, Rāma went to Vasistha and touched his feet; they both sat together. At some distance sat Bharata, looking at his brother in the dress of a hermit. Everyone stood wondering what Bharata would say to his elder brother; eagerness began to rise.

Rāma asked him, 'Tell me in full why you have come in hermit's dress here, leaving the kingdom.' Bharata said with

folded hands, 'Noble one! father did a terrible thing and left for heaven, overwhelmed with grief for the son. He was prompted by a woman — my mother — and did a sinful thing that ruined his fame. She is now a widow; she did not succeed in her aim either. The mother of mine will fall into grieving hell. But, here I am, your slave; please grant me this. Come and take the crown. All these people and the widowed mothers have come to you to seek this favour. Take the kingdom and fulfil our wish, as per *dharma*. Along with the ministers, here is a humble prayer from your brother, your disciple, your slave. Do not ignore this assembly of counsels.' Bharata held Rāma's feet.

Rāma embraced him and said, 'How could a man like you, born of noble line, with noble nature and conduct, adopt an evil course, for kingdom's sake? So, I see no fault in you, not in the least. Nor should you blame your mother; she must be held in respect as much as the father. When they, both followers of *dharma*, told me to go to forest, how could I do otherwise? You should get the crown and I should live in Dandaka. Having made that dispensation, the king has gone to heaven. His word is the authority. I shall take my share and you should take yours.'

Night fell as they talked. Next morning, the brothers bathed in the Gangā and stood beside Rāma; none spoke a word. Then Bharata declared in the midst of ail, 'To please my mother this kingdom was given to me. That I give to you, now; please take this kingdom, free of any hindrance.² The state is like a flooded place when the dam has burst. Who can protect it but you? You know I am like a mule before a horse, like a chicken before the eagle. I am not capable of emulating you.' People thought he had spoken well.

Rāma said with composure, 'The self is not free to act as man pleases; the deeds of the past drag him here and there, all the time. Things that are heaped up must diminish, all things that rise must fall, all meetings must end in parting; life lasts only till death. Fruits that ripen can't escape a fall; men that live can't escape death. Like the solid mansion that